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COMETH UP AS A FLOWER.

VOL. I.

COMETH UP AS A FLOWER.

An Autobiography.

"Is the old man yet alive?"

B. 93

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

75727
ac

SECOND EDITION.

Rhoda Broughton



Kx. 6. 647

LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.
1867.

TO

JOSEPH SHERIDAN LE FANU,

THIS TALE IS INSCRIBED

AS A SMALL TOKEN OF

AFFECTIONATE REGARD

BY

THE AUTHOR.

COMETH UP AS A FLOWER.

CHAPTER I.

"WHEN I die, I'll be buried under that big old ash tree over yonder—the one that Dolly and I cut our names on with my jagged old penknife nine, ten years ago now. I utterly reject and abdicate my reserved seat in the family mausoleum. I don't see the fun of undergoing one's dusty transformation between a moulder-ing grandpapa and a mouldered great-grandpapa. Every English gentleman or lady likes to have a room to themselves when they are alive. Why not when they are dead? Yes, when my time to make a decent ending has come, I'll have a snug hole grubbed for me right under my old friend the ash (the near one, isn't it?)

and there I'll make myself as comfortable as circumstances will permit amongst the lobbies, and the woodlice, &c. And Dolly (if she survives me, as I hope she won't, and as I'm sure she will) shall plant a rose at my head, and a gillyflower at my feet, and daffydowndillies on each side of me, and there I'll sleep as sound as a top, and not dream a bit, whatever Hamlet says to the contrary."

These remarks I made to no other audience than myself, consequently they were received without any marks of dissent. I did not say them aloud; for, within my experience, people do not soliloquise at the top of their voices, save at Drury-lane and Covent-garden, but, as it were, to my *Philon Hetor*, or dear heart. And as I soliloquised I leaned the rather frayed elbows of my venerable holland frock on the top of the low stone wall that parted our big hay meadow (the largest of the fields belonging to the Grange) from the churchyard. It was the pleasantest hour, videlicet 9 P.M., of one of the pleasantest days of the pleasantest month in the whole year, May. There had not been a

breath of wind all day, but at sundown a little whiff had arisen from no one knew where, except that from its fragrance and velvet softness, one felt sure that its original home must have been heaven. Rejoicing in it, the elms were waving their topmost crowns, and talking to one another, low and stately, in their own language, which none but themselves and the wind can comprehend. I think they were telling each other how strong the spring sap was running through their leafy veins, and how grateful was the touch of the dew-freshened flowers about their gnarled feet. And the grass, not green now, but clad by twilight in dim silver gray, was talking too, as any one might see, who watched its blades and spears bowing and swaying to catch each other's confidences.

Ours was a churchyard that it would have been a real luxury to be buried in. It inspired one with no horrible, hardly even melancholy ideas. One never thought of skulls or cross-bones, or greedy worms, while looking at those turfy mounds sloping so softly; those mounds that the

westering sun always gave his last good-night kiss to before he went to bed behind the craggy purple hill. Were one really dead, stowed away in one's appointed oak-box, it would concern one, no doubt, not a whit whether one were huddled with other oak boxes into some ghastly pit, among the dark be-nettled grass of some city charnel, or laid down reverently in the fragrant earth, shadowed by some peaceable little gray church tower, such as ours was. But while one is yet alive, and one's oak box is as yet not a box at all, but the trunk of some branchy tree, one cannot realize this. Unconsciously we fancy that we shall smell the odorous mignonette and carnations that are revelling in the summer sunshine above our heads, that we shall hear the birds preaching our funeral sermons, and singing their own epithalamiums, when spring comes back, that we shall shiver in the snow, and be chilled by the wintry rains.

During my meditations, my elbows had grown quite numb with resting so long on the cold stone, and of this I at length

became aware. I raised them from their uneasy position, and rubbed them slowly and affectionately.

"I wish I were in the churchyard," said I (to myself, as before). "I could sit so comfortably on old Mrs. Barlow's big flat tombstone, and perhaps I might be inspired to compose an elegy that would make Gray's hide its diminished head. If Dolly were here she would say it was indelicate and unladylike for a grown-up woman to be scrambling over walls. But as Dolly is not here, to the winds with gentility! There's nobody to see me except a few bats, and perhaps a ghost or two."

And so I clambered over, and got coated with lichens in the process, and made for Mrs. Barlow's tomb, sat down upon it, and fell into a reverie. I had read all the inscriptions scores of times; they were of the usual type,

"Affliction sore long time I bore," &c.,

decidedly bearing away the palm of popularity. Just opposite to me was an upright stone, with the somewhat halting,

but highly impressive poetic effort, which is to be found in every graveyard over England, inscribed upon it—

> "When the Archangel's trump shall sound,
> And souls to bodies join,
> Thousands shall wish their stay on earth
> Had been as short as mine."

For the twentieth time I was perusing this gloomy prophecy, supposed to be spoken by an infant of tender years, and was marvelling whether the gifted but unknown author intended the rhyme to be "*join* and *moine*," or "*jine* and *mine*," when I was startled by hearing the lych gate behind me swing on its hinges. I turned my head round with a jerk, and the archangel and the prophetic baby went out of my head together. In the waning light I saw the figure of a man. If he were a ghost he was a very substantial one, besides a ghost would not have banged the gate, and oh! I never heard of a ghost that whistled Meyerbeer's "Shadow Air!" It could not be the sexton, for he was a humpbacked sexagenarian, who would as soon have thought

of burying himself in one of his own graves as of courting rheumatism amid the damp dews of a May evening. It could not be any one of the John Smiths or Robert Browns of the parish; for besides that the bumpkins in our parts are not given to indulging in the sentimental melancholy of pilgrimages to the tombs of their respective Betsys, and Anns, and Marthas, one glance, even though the light was waning, sufficed to show me that the new comer was a gentleman. He did not appear to have seen me at first, as he stood there in the church path, with his hands in his pockets, and a meerschaum in his mouth, "viewing the landscape o'er."

I cannot bear being in the company of a person who is not aware of my proximity. I always experience something of the guilty feeling of a spy or eavesdropper, so I coughed gently, to hint to him that there was a young woman perched, ghoul-like, on a gravestone in his vicinity. Having so coughed, I was overcome with shyness, and durst not look round again, to watch the result of my manœuvre. I

suppose it succeeded, for he certainly manifested no signs of surprise, as he came close by me, in his deliberate saunter towards the church.

"What is he like?" asked the inquisitiveness of nineteen within my breast. "What's that to you?" said Decorum. "Everything," returned Inquisitiveness. I must have one peep. I had one peep. As he passed I looked up at him, and he looked down at me, and our eyes met. There was nothing impudent in his gaze, none of the fervent admiration with which, at a first introduction, the hero in a novel regards the young lady who, at a later period of the story, is to make a great fool of, or be made a great fool by him. It simply expressed the moderate amount of curiosity with which a young Englishman regards a young Englishwoman whom he sees for the first time. "Are you pretty, I wonder? It's almost impossible to tell by this light." So said those dark, gray eyes, and that was all they said. Why I did it I do not know, and cannot explain to this day, but with my usual stupidity I blushed crimson; forehead and

throat and ears all shared the crimson glow. I became a lobster. Perhaps it was only my guilty imagination, but I fancied I detected a slight smile dawning under a great yellow moustache—a smile which good manners and gentlemanlike feeling strangled in the birth.

However that might be, he made no pause in his walk, but strolled on, and sat down on another tombstone somewhat similar to mine, a few yards further on, where he puffed away solemnly at his pipe, and kept his eyes to himself. I could have scratched my cheeks till they bled, in my righteous anger against them. "So missish!" said I, internally, with much severity. "So school girlish, as if you had never seen a man before!" The ridiculousness of the situation tickled my fancy irresistibly; two people seated, each on their several tombstone, within bow-shot of one another, silent, solemn, and unsociable. I felt that I should disgrace myself by laughing outright if I stayed much longer, and besides the hour was growing late, so I rose from my seat and dawdled towards the gate. As I

reached it I heard a deep voice behind me say, "Allow me," and as he spoke, the stranger unlatched the gate, and politely opened it for my benefit. Then he took off his hat, displaying a head of curly yellow hair, and smiled. I was taken by surprise and covered with confusion. "Thank you," I mumbled, ungraciously enough, and made a somewhat gawky inclination, the effect of which was still further marred by the fact that in the very act of making it I trod on my own dress, nearly tripping myself up, and all but measuring my length on the ground in a profounder salaam than I had any intention of executing.

CHAPTER II.

THOUGH I ran nearly all the way, it was striking ten on the stable clock before I stood under the faint thick clusters of monthly roses that glimmered out of the dark ivy above the heavy, nail-studded, old oak door of my home. We had a big house, but we were not big people—at least not now; we used to be, but we had gone down in the world. People at whom fifty years ago we turned up our noses, now turned up their noses at us. We had come sailing over the sea in beaked ships with Norman William; we had poured out our blood like water, under lion-hearted Richard, for the Holy Sepulchre; we had had fat abbey lands given us by King Henry of the many wives, we had married heiresses, and had gone mounting up to the top of fortune's wheel, and it had been well with us. But

alack! in these latter days we had been but too well known at Epsom and Newmarket; we had been very much at home at Crockford's when Crockford's was; we had wasted our young affections and substance on operatic Phrynes; we had run away with our neighbour's wives, and had generally misbehaved ourselves; and, in consequence, our many thousands had dwindled to very few hundreds, and our fair acres passed into the hands of Manchester gents with fat, smug faces, who waged a war of extermination against the letter H, and used big words where little ones would have done better. So the poor old house was very much out of repair, and there was no money wherewith to patch up its stout old walls.

But all this time I am keeping myself waiting at my own hall-door while detailing my family's genealogy. I stayed a moment to bury my face in a bunch of pale roses, whose scent the night air brought out pure and strong, and then passed into the dim old hall. At this time of night it was as gloomy and ghostly an old place as one would wish

to see—very big, very dark, with heavy beams across the low ceiling, oak panels sadly in want of varnish, coats of arms that showed what brilliant marriages we had made in the old times, mangy stags' heads with bulging glass eyes, and rather damaged family portraits. It would have taken a vast expenditure of gas to have lit it up properly, and in lieu of such expenditure one solitary composite candle blinked sleepily from the middle of the large ricketty hall-table, illuminating the Family Bible out of which I read prayers to the servants in an impressive and quasi-clerical manner every morning and evening, and leaving the rest of the apartment "to darkness and to me." As I entered, I was met by a ricketty old man, who, somehow, seemed of a piece with the rest of the establishment, in whose superannuated old body centred the functions of butler, under-butler, groom of the chambers, valet, footman, and page, and whom my father kept on from a motive of compassion, and because he hated changes.

"Tea is ready, Miss," remarked this

desirable body servant, emerging from the gloom into the little circle of pale light round the candle.

"Is it?" said I, nothing more original occurring to me to say, as I stroked down my untidy ruddy locks with my fingers.

Without further addition to my toilette, for I feared to keep my father waiting, I ran down two or three shallow, well-worn stone steps into the dining-room. It was likewise very big and very dark, with more panels that obtrusively proclaimed their destitution of varnish to each casual observer, and with more family pictures glooming down out of black frames, in their faded beauty, for beauty the Le Stranges, man and woman, always had apparently in those old times, however degenerate they might be now. The table in the middle of the room, laid for two people, scantly furnished with light, and scantlier still with eatables, showed like an oasis in a desert of obscurity. My father was already in his old velvet arm-chair, and was sitting leaning forward with his head between

his hands, in a pose sufficiently expressive. You did not need to see his face to tell you that here was a man careworn and weary, on whom the sun of his life's afternoon was beating scorching hot, a man with whom life was going awry—awry I should think it was; the old house was going down hill, and he did not like it; the brambles had sprung up rankly, and were choking the Lebanonian cedar; he and his were last where they used to be first, and he felt that it would be the death of him. Brave as the Spartan boy, he kept the vitals-gnawing fox hidden under his cloak, away from the eyes of the coldly-prying world—a world often ill-naturedly curious in seeking out and putting its fingers through the tatters in its neighbour's coat—a world

> "That would peep and botanize
> Upon its mother's grave."

I gambolled up to him in a kid-like manner. "Well," said I cheerfully, "I suppose the tea is quite cold, and you're quite cross, and I'm to have a real good

scolding, aren't I?" Then I stooped and kissed the whitened hairs.

"Eh, what?" said he, thus suddenly called back from his joyless reverie to the contemplation of a young round face that was dear to him, and vainly endeavouring to extricate himself from the meshes of a redundant crop of curly hair, which was being flourished, in its redness, before his face. "Indeed, Nell, I'd forgotten your very existence that minute."

"What could have chased so pleasing an image from your mind's eye?" said I, laughing.

"What always chases every pleasing image," he answered, gloomily.

"Bills, I suppose," returned I discontentedly, "bills, bills, bills! that's the song in this house from morning to night. Is there any word of one syllable in the English language that includes so many revolting ideas!"

"None except hell," said my father, bitterly, "and I sometimes think they're synonymous."

"Dad," said I, "take my advice and try a new plan, don't worry about them

any more, take no notice at all of them, we've got the air and the sunshine, and one another left, we ought to be happy, and if the worst comes to the worst, we can but go to gaol, where we shall be nicely dressed, well fed, and have our hair cut, all for nothing."

My ideas of a debtor's prison were evidently not derived from "Pickwick" or "Little Dorrit," inextricably mingled were they with my recollections of the felon's gaol at Nantford our county town.

Papa shook his head, "All very well to say 'don't worry,' Nell; as well say to a criminal on the scaffold 'don't be hanged,' or to a dead body, 'don't be buried;' to be worried or not worried does not depend upon an effort of the will, child."

I had by this time established myself among the cups and saucers. As he spoke, I held the teapot suspended in mid air, and paused. "Dad," said I, "doesn't it say in the Bible, 'sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.'"

"Yes, Nell, and it says too, 'man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward.' I do not doubt the wisdom or truth of the

first, but the last comes home to my inmost soul, 'as the sparks fly upward!'" He looked up as he spoke, as though tracing the flight of the sparks.

"If you sigh like that," said I, pettishly, "you'll blow the candles out, and then there'll be no sparks to go up."

My father made no rejoinder, and we both ate in silence for some minutes. But at that period of my life, I had no talent whatever *pour le silence;* I would rather have harangued a cod's head than hold my peace. I began again.

"Dad."

"Well."

"Please to listen. I'm going to tell you something; come down from the clouds, or up from the pit, wherever you are."

"I'm all attention."

"Well," said I, narratively, "you must know that I found you so dull and unsociable this evening, that I betook myself to the churchyard!"

"Did you find anybody, I should rather say any of the bodies, particularly sociable there?"

"I rather like dead people's company, pa; they don't contradict one, and one has not to make talk for them, but I saw something besides tombstones to-night. Guess what?"

"A pig?"

"No."

"A widow?"

"No."

"A ghost or two?"

"Fiddlestick!"

"My divining powers are exhausted then," said my father, looking as if he should be rather thankful if I would leave him in peace.

"Guess again."

"Oh, plague take it, how do I know what you saw? one of our servants, perhaps, or some other sight equally strange and invigorating."

"It was not anything of ours, we have not got anything half so good looking about the place, dad, it was a *man!*"

"What sort of a man, old Iken?"

"Well, if it was old Iken, old Iken is six foot high at least, and has got wavy yellow hair, and I have been labouring

under a delusion as to his personal appearance for the last nineteen years."

"Young John Barlow, perhaps, come to see whether his mother's tombstone is put up right."

"No such thing, dad. It was no more John Barlow than it was John the Baptist, and that you'll own, is not probable."

"Some counterjumper from Nantford, probably; they get themselves up much finer than gentlemen now-a-days," said my father, ruefully.

"Papa, don't you suppose I know gold from brass? don't I know a gentleman when I have the luck to see one? *My* man had no ditchwater in his veins, he had a decidedly warlike air too, and you know, dad, you and I have a *penchant* for soldiers; haven't we?"

"I have a *penchant* for peace, my dear, if you would be kind enough to drink your tea, and let me indulge it. Probably this prodigy was one of the Burgoynes, if you are quite sure he was neither Iken Barlow nor a pig."

"No, no; it was not one of the Burgoynes. I know them both. John is

crooked, and Charles squints; they are a pair of ugly little boys, and this was a man." My parent smiled benignly at my enthusiasm concerning the beauty of the unknown.

"What's your definition of a man, Nell? John Burgoyne would be surprised to find he did not come under that head. I think in his own estimation he's something very little lower than the angels."

"He may be very little lower than the angels," said I, pouring myself out a second cup, "for I haven't the least idea how high the angels are; but he's a great deal lower than my man—two inches I should think."

"It's a pity we cannot solve the enigma of his name, Nell. 'My man' is rather a vague designation, isn't it?"

I laughed, not quite so musically as usual perhaps, because my voice was partially smothered in buttered toast.

"Yes, dad, and the worst of it is, it isn't true either; he *is* not mine, and what's more, he is not ever likely to be either. Oh, dad, I wish we could find out about him. You don't know how pleasant he looked; almost

as nice as you when you've got your Sunday coat on."

"That gives an idea of majestic beauty, I own," said my father, with a little gentle sneer at his own stooped shoulders and bowed head.

To my mind it did; in my eyes my father had the amaranthine bloom of ivy-crowned Dionysius. Love looks beyond the withered husk to the fresh kernel, and I knew that to me his heart was always young.

"He was an elderly gentleman, was he?" continued my father. "I begin to think better of him. I fancied at first that he was some foolish young puppy, not come to years of discretion."

"Papa, I like puppies; there's much more life and fun about them than about mumbling old dogs. I don't mean by that that you are a mumbling old dog."

"I did not mean any insult to him, my dear, by calling him a puppy. I'd be a puppy again myself this minute if I could; I'd compound for puppy brains if I could get back puppy spirits with them."

"Are people always happier when they are young than when they are old, pa?"

"Mostly, I think."

"Then I hope I shall die young."

Whereupon I fell a-thinking what an interesting young corpse I should make lying in the big four-poster in the red room, with my emaciated hands folded on my bosom, and a deluge of white flowers about me.

"You'll die, darling, when God pleases," said my father, with his dear old voice shaking a little. "Whether He takes you away from the evil to come, as He did your little mother, or leaves you to fight out the weary fight to the end, as it pleased Him that I should."

Then he rose, and I, running to him, stole my hand into his, and we left the room together in sober fashion.

CHAPTER III.

THE next day, the 18th of May, 18—, was a day of note in my life. I had been looking forward to it during the past week with a small portion of pleasant anticipation and a large portion of shy tremor. It was the day of my first dinner-party. Yes, though I was nineteen years of age, I had never been at one of those solemn symposiums which form the Englishman's idea of festivity. Only twice or thrice during all my nineteen years had I exhibited my bare neck and arms to an admiring public, and once I had been to a ball. That ball seemed to me the one thing of importance that had ever happened to me. I dated from it as the Greeks did from the first Olympiad, or the Romans, *ab urbe conditâ*.

Dolly—let it be understood that Dolly is my sister, and my senior by four years

—had rather got into the habit of repressing me—keeping me and what charms I had in the background, hiding my light, if I had any light, under a bushel. As for herself, she loved the world, technically so called, with all her heart, and soul, and strength, with the one-idead devotion of a Frenchwoman.

In the main, I was tolerably content to remain under the bushel where I had been deposited by sisterly care; having hardly tasted the fire-water of dissipation, I did not miss its stimulus. I stayed at home with my old daddy, and pottered about our pleasant, weedy old garden, cawed around by clamorous rooks, and where Jacob's ladder, and columbines, and white pinks, and lilies of all sorts and sizes flourished with a luxuriance I have never seen approached in trimmer parterres. O dear old dad! when shall I walk hand in hand with you again? Will you call me your little Nell in Heaven? I do not want you to be a glorified saint, with an aureole round your head, and triumphant joy in your altered eyes; no longer full of that careworn, tender look. I thirst

to see you just as you were, in the old hall garden, just as you were with your dear gray head, and your shabby old coat, and your poor sorrowful smile. I should not recognize you, exultant in your palmy crown, I who only knew you toiling along under your heavy cross.

Let me try and forget you, oh, my father; do without you, as one after another we have to do without our darlings here below. Let me go back to the old Castle Rackrent, where I lived when I was not all alone. Lazy and dowdy I pottered about there, with my inconveniently abundant hair fastened up, in an unbecoming lump, at the back of my head, and my slim young body encased in such of Dolly's old clothes as I could induce to meet across me. Sometimes, indeed, it struck me that it would be pleasant to flaunt about in airy fashionable raiment, such as my sister rejoiced in, instead of in my sorry gowns, which made my figure look as if it went out wherever it ought to go in, and went in wherever it ought to go out. Once for a few days, I cherished the wild scheme

of launching forth my small boat on the ocean of the world outside the old black and white house, with the casemented windows, and the queer gargoyle faces grinning down on us poor players strutting out our little day beneath them. I even let my fancy stray amongst troops of unknown, ardent youths, all of whom bore a resemblance more or less *prononcé* to a certain penniless Captain Gordon, with whom, at the before-mentioned ball, I had danced eight several times, thereby drawing down the vials of Dolly's wrath on my devoted head.

Once, and once only, I rebelled against my enforced hermitship, and we had a grand quarrel upon the subject. But Dolly being strong-minded, and I being weak-minded, I being the earthenware vessel, and she the iron one, the dispute ended, as our disputes always did, by my *fondant en larmes*, begging Dolly's pardon, and submitting.

"After all," said I to myself, leaning out of the window among the honeysuckle sprays, to cool my tear-swollen cheeks, "it is as it should be." Dolly was

beautiful, and the Le Stranges had always been beautiful, and it was right she should go forth and be a credit to the old house, and I was ugly, and the Le Stranges had never been ugly, and it was meet that I should keep in the obscurity for which alone I was calculated. But was I ugly? It was not very often that I asked myself whether the face that met me night and morning in my looking-glass was one calculated to make men's hearts ache, and their hot blood surge, or to lull them in a stagnant calm; but now and again the question would suggest itself, and clamour to be answered. Was I ugly? Hesitatingly, slowly, sadly, regretfully, I always answered in the affirmative. Sometimes I feared I was distressingly ugly. There was nothing neat, or smooth, or regular about my face, and oh those carrotty locks! How many sighs and inward groans they cost me.

One day I resolved to ask Dolly's opinion about my outward woman. Dolly was not a very nice person I thought, not very easy to live with, and though she was my only

sister, I did not care much about her; but for her judgment I had the profoundest reverence. We were sitting in the hall that winter morning. Dolly on a dark oak settle with a carved and writhen back, by the wide fireplace, in which a great log of wood was crackling and sputtering cheerily, and against the faded Utrecht velvet, Dolly's bright blue draperies, and pure young profile, stood out clear and bright. I, who have a propensity for sitting on things that were not intended to be sat on, and for not sitting on things that were so intended, was squatting in an ungraceful but agreeable attitude, on the middle of a long table, that ran along under the windows over against her, hugging my own knees.

Dolly was a very fair woman to look upon; a small oval face, liquid brown eyes that had a way of looking up meekly and beseechingly, that no man less self-contained than St. Senanus could resist, a little sharp-cut nose absolutely perfect, a sweet grave mouth, and an expression nun-like, dove-like, Madonna-like; she looked as if her life must be one long prayer. I do

not think it was though, or if it was it was a prayer said backwards. I gazed at her with youthful enthusiasm, dashed with envy.

"Dolly," said I, "I wish I were as pretty as you."

"Do you?" said Dolly, not looking up from her work, for what was the good of looking meekly, beseechingly at me?

"Yes, I do," said I, "I'd pray for such a face every night among my other prayers, only I know it would be no good."

"Not the slightest, I should say."

"I wonder why God gives some people so many more gifts than others; will he make it up to the poor ugly ones in Heaven?"

"You'd better consult Mr. Bowles."

Now Mr. Bowles was our curate, and an individual for whom I entertained one of those unreasoning, unjustifiable abhorrences, often bred in the immature minds of the extremely young of the female sex, for some one of their acquaintance.

"Dolly," said I, reproachfully, "that's always the way you answer my questions. I'm sure I wonder that I ever ask you any."

"Don't, then."

"By-the-by, Dolly," getting rather hot, and clutching my knees more firmly than ever, "do you think I am—ahem—ahem—so *very* ugly?"

"I never think about it," responded Dolly, coolly.

"But do think about it, this once, Dolly, please," I urged anxiously.

Dolly raised her sweet eyes, and surveyed my perturbed countenance calmly.

"I don't admire you," she said, dropping them again, "but that's no reason why somebody should not. Some people may like red hair and a wide mouth."

I yielded to destiny. I *was* ugly. I must try and be good, or clever, or eccentric, for it was very evident that pretty I could never be. I was ashamed of myself for having mooted the question. At the time I am writing of, Dolly was away from home on a visit to some admiring friends in a distant county, and to this fact was owing my introduction to the world. Her absence was a matter of great, though secret rejoicing, both to my father and myself. We did not tell one

another we were glad, but I think we were each tolerably well aware of the other's sentiments. Truth to tell, our Madonna kept us rather in order, and was somewhat of a thorn in the flesh to us. I sometimes caught myself wondering whether, in the event of Dolly's death, I should be enabled to cry a little and wear a decent semblance of grief. I hoped I should be, but misdoubted myself somewhat. I need not have been disquieted. As I write, myself tottering on the verge of that last bed I so tiredly long for, Dolly is in the heyday of health and prosperity. Dolly will have that tear difficulty to contend with in my case; not I in hers. She will vanquish it, and will weep plentifully over this poor thin carcass, which indeed is ugly now.

CHAPTER IV.

At about half-past six on the evening of that ever memorable day when I crossed the narrow brook between "womanhood and childhood fleet," my father's voice came sounding up the crooked oak staircase to my virgin chamber. "Nell, Nell, the carriage is waiting!" I was standing dressed, with all my worldly goods scattered higgledy-piggledy about me, making derisive faces at my own image in the glass, and wondering to myself whether any one in England was the owner of such obnoxious locks as mine; wondering likewise, whether it would be wrong to smash the mirror which told me such disagreeable truths.

"I'm coming, pa," responded I, still making passes at the pale, rose-filleted head I saw there. "Ugh, you fright! There's pa calling again. Where are my gloves? Oh, Heavens, where can they

have gone to? Yes, pa, this very minute! What a potato face! It can't be helped. I *must* go." Thus ejaculating, I darted down stairs. My father looked at me as I stood before him with an expression more doubtful than admiring.

"I don't know much about such things, Nell," he began, dubiously; "but is not your gown rather—what d'ye call it? I do not know how to express myself; is not it rather scant and shabby?"

"It *is* rather skimping, I'm afraid, pa, and I *did* let down two inches, and put in a new breadth too, but tarletane is *so* dear now-a-days."

A look of mortified vexation clouded his kind old face as I spoke.

"I wish I'd known this before," he began; but I interrupted him.

"Please do not trouble about it," I said, hastily; "ten to one not a soul will know what I have on, or whether I have anything on at all!"

The cloud did not disperse; it deepened.

"I like you to look as well as other people. I don't want people to say that I'm too poor to dress my girls properly."

"They won't say anything of the kind, dad, unless they are disagreeable, purse-proud snobs; and if they do say it we shan't hear them!"

"I don't want my little girl to be cut out by those fine Miss Coxes," persisted my father, thinking bitterly of the days when the said Miss Coxes' sire would have been glad to clean his boots for him.

I laughed. "Papa," said I, "if I were dressed in sackcloth and ashes, or in the brim of a hat and spurs, I should look more like a lady than those great bouncing, overdressed dairymaids, and after all, that's all that matters much."

A three miles' drive through the soft spring evening, along a turnpike road, with close-cropped hedges on either side, whence the shears had lopped off all the pretty hawthorn flowers, leaving only dusty leaves; then we drew up before a Grecian portico, on which the arms of the Coxes — arrived last month from the Heralds' College—were blazoned in full-blown glory, while a nondescript antique bird, half cock, half griffin, and supposed to be the Coxe crest, showed its ugly

stone-beak and claws all over the house in every nook and angle where antique bird could perch. Big footmen, all calves and crimson plush, on whose heads the dredging-box had done its work, a blaze of light and Babel of voices, and then I, not knowing exactly whether I was on my head or my heels, found myself being presented by my father to a large woman, whose roseate arms were fettered with heavy gold bracelets, fresh from the jeweller's, and above whose pug face a tiara rose like a mural crown.

Having got through the ceremony of introduction, I subsided into a chair, and gradually gained courage to look about me. A lofty, spacious saloon, oh, how unlike ours at home; wax-lit chandeliers, Cupids and Psyches sprawling on the ceiling; Carlo Dolcean Madonnas smiling insipidly, and Claudean landscapes flashing sunnily from the walls, a general impression of gilding and ormolu and white paint. There was a very large party of substantial country gentlemen, lords and commoners, with bald pates, and a prosperous stall-fed air, not unlike their own oxen; matrons with

double chins, in the folds and creases of whose fat necks diamonds blazed fitfully; youths, for whom Poole had done his utmost; and girls like a flock of full-plumaged doves. Oh, those young ladies! I could bear the gorgeous dowagers; I could bear the irreproachable cornets, and baronets, and undergraduates, but the girls were too much for my equanimity. If my poor frock had looked scant and skimping in the hall at home, where it had the background of oak chairs and panels to set it off, what aspect must it have worn here, among the crisp *chefs-d'œuvre* of Mmes. Descou and Elise? It *was* ashamed of itself, I think, for it clung to me, limp and flabby, like a wet bathing-dress; and to complete my discomfiture, I discovered that my hair was dressed in a fashion that had died the death at least a year and a half ago.

I was as much a stranger in this my own neighbourhood as a native of Kamtschatka could have been, and knew not a soul. Several people (men especially) looked at me, and I attributed their notice solely to my outlandish attire.

"They are wondering who that bundle of rags, that scarecrow, is!" said I, bitterly, to myself. "Oh, Nelly Lestrange, you poor dowdy, how I wish you were back in your old holland gown, eating cold mutton for tea, in the dining-room at home!"

I was very childish for my age, and I felt very lonely—so lonely that the tears came into my eyes as I sat contemplating my hands lying in their wrinkled eighteen-penny gloves upon my lap. Just as dinner was announced, a gentleman entered the room — a gentleman, the adornment of whose person had apparently detained him somewhat long. He was a tall, broad-shouldered man, with yellow hair—a man whom the armour of some strong King Olaf, some red-handed Jarl, would not have misbecome. I recognized him in a moment; he was the hero of my churchyard adventure. My father, who was just in the act of conducting old Lady Blank to the festive board, looked over his shoulder, and smiled at me. I smiled too; and a minute afterwards I had quite forgot my limp one-skirted

frock and ill-dressed hair. All my annoyances were merged in shy pleasure when I found that my Viking was under orders to take me in to dinner. But when he had so taken me, and had deposited me on a gorgeous velvet chair beside him, he did not seem in any violent hurry to cultivate my acquaintance. He ate his soup deliberately, and left me to the contemplation of his outward man. Perhaps he knew that he was pleasant to look upon, and trusted to that pleasantness to prepossess a stranger in his favour; perhaps he did not care whether I were prepossessed or not. I was soupless; so I amused myself glancing obliquely at my neighbour. Very curly Saxon hair—so curly as to excite in envious, lank-haired brother officers a suspicion (a base and unfounded suspicion) of the agency of tongs; a beautiful bronzed face, with the scar of a sabre-cut running down the cheek, close to the ear; a beardless, whiskerless face; hairless, save for the heavy tawny moustache.

"I wish he'd speak," said I to myself at last. "Perhaps he has nothing to say;

good-looking men seldom have the gift of tongues, Dolly says." I would as soon have thought of cutting off my head as of originating a conversation with a perfect stranger, so I held my peace, and wondered how he had acquired that scar. At last, as if he had read my thoughts, he turned towards me.

"I'm afraid I startled you rather, last night?" said he, with a smile.

"Not much," responded I, briefly, turning my head half away, after the manner of shy girls.

"Did you think I was an evil spirit or a bogy, going about, seeking whom I might devour?" he asked, more familiarly. I suppose he saw I was young and a raw recruit in the ranks of the *beau monde*, and consequently that he might treat me as *sich*.

"No, I didn't," said I, "because—;" and there I stopped. I was going to say "because you are too good-looking for a bogy," but I recollected in time that it is an inversion of the order of society for a young lady to pay broad compliments to an unknown gentleman.

"Because what?" asked he.

"Because—because—," said I, floundering about, and seizing desperately the first reason that occurred to me, silly as that reason happened to be, "because I never heard of a bogy with yellow hair!"

"My hair is not yellow," responded he, carelessly; "nothing half so nice; sandy decidedly."

"It is not my idea of sandy," I maintained stoutly.

"What is your idea of sandy, then, may I ask?"

"Mrs. Coxe's is sandy," said I, with youthful rashness, looking towards the lady of the house, "and very hideous it is."

"I am sorry you think her so hideous," responded he, coolly; "she's my sister!"

I was covered with confusion. I would fain have slipped from my chair underneath the table, and spent the remainder of the dinner-hour among the feet of the company. I reddened to the roots of my hair, which, as I have before mentioned, was red too. My shamefaced eyes sought my plate, and studied the parrot-poppy depicted thereon in glowing colours. I

attempted no apology, but sat dumb-foundered. Then a deep voice, stifling much laughter, sounded close to my blazing ear.

"Never mind! I won't tell of you. By-the-by, Mrs. Coxe is not my sister, and I only said so to frighten you."

I felt extremely angry, though profoundly relieved.

"How could you tell such a story?" I asked, reproachfully.

"It was not a story, as you call it," he answered, with an almost imperceptible mimicking of my indignant intonation. "In one sense, she *is* my sister. We are all brethren, aren't we?—at least, we call each other dearly beloved brethren in the prayer-book every Sunday."

"That is very flippant," said I gravely; I had a great respect for the prayer-book, and did not like to hear it mentioned so lightly. I fancied he looked slightly surprised that a country chit like me should venture to rebuke a man of the world like him, but he said nothing to that effect, and rather abruptly changed the subject.

"Is it one of the manners and customs of the young ladies in these parts to sit among the tombs towards nightfall?" he inquired.

"I don't know about other young ladies; *I* sit there sometimes."

"You are a strong-minded person, evidently; cart ropes would not drag one of my sisters within half a mile of a churchyard after dark."

"Indeed! How many sisters have you got?—

> "'Sisters and brothers, little maid,
> How many may you be?' eh?"

"'Sisters and brothers, little *man*,' it ought to be in this case; oughtn't it? Well, I've got two."

"Are they like you?"

"Not a bit; much better looking."

I felt incredulous, but I hope I kept my incredulity out of my countenance.

"Have you been here long?" I resumed, catechetically.

"Since last Tuesday,"

"Are you going to stay here long?"

"That depends upon how I like my

quarters. Is there anything more you wish to know?"

"Oh, I beg your pardon; I'm sorry I asked so many questions," I said contritely, fearing I had committed a grievous sin against good manners. "I did not intend to be rude, indeed?"

"Rude," said he, "nonsense! I should not think such a pretty mouth could say anything rude, if it tried."

It was rather impudent of him, certainly, and I ought to have told him so, I suppose; but, as he spoke, the dark gray eyes looked full into mine, with an expression I had never seen in mortal eyes before; an expression that sealed my lips, and sent a sort of odd shiver — a shiver that had nothing to say to cold, through my frame. I felt that to the utter neglect of "beignets aux huitres" (than which no dish can be more delectable), he was watching me, which did not add to my composure.

"Don't be angry with me," he said at last, in a tone that meant to be penitent, bending his handsome head down towards my downcast face. "I didn't mean to say it—it slipped out."

"I'm not angry," I said, with some difficulty; "that is, not very; but I'm afraid —you—think—I'm an ignorant country bumpkin, to whom you may say anything you like?"

"Upon my soul, I don't," he replied, earnestly. "I think—well! it doesn't matter much what I think about you."

"You cannot think much about me," said I, "seeing that you have only known me for about a quarter of an hour."

"It doesn't take long to know some people!"

"They're so shallow, you mean?" suggested I, attempting to be arch.

"What a shame!" he said, "you know I didn't mean that; but have you never heard of a sort of inexplicable sympathy and attraction between two people at first sight?"

I had heard of something else at first sight, but I did not say so.

"I have nobody to sympathize with or be attracted to, at home, except papa, and our old man servant, and the sexton."

"What do you mean? do you never go out anywhere?"

"Never. Dolly does often, but I don't."

"Who is Dolly?" he asked, rather amused at my *naïvété*, "or I suppose I ought to say who's *Miss* or *Mrs.* Dolly?"

"Dolly is my sister."

"Oh! older or younger?"

"Four years older; she was twenty-three last January, and I am nineteen this month."

"You are very candid."

"Am I? why should not I be?"

"No reason whatever; and do you and Dolly—I beg her pardon, *Miss* Dolly, live together, all alone?"

"All alone! oh dear no; we live with papa, of course; that is papa opposite."

How many more revelations concerning my family history I might have made in my young ingenuousness can never now be ascertained, for at this point I perceived Mrs. Coxe inclining her head towards the old woman of exaltedest rank at the other end of the table; whereupon we all sailed and floated and shuffled out of the room. How glad I should have

been to have stayed with the gentlemen; protected by papa, and condescendingly chatted to by my blonde King Olaf! With my return to the drawing-room, returned my sense of loneliness, my consciousness of shabby clothes, and my embarrassment as to the disposal of my hands. There was no wish, I am sure, among those dames and damsels to neglect or be unkind to the poor gawky young stranger; it was only the force of circumstances. One good-natured, graceful Lady Alice tried her best to extract my ideas on the comparative charms of Brighton and Scarboro'; but finding I had no ideas on the subject to be extracted, she desisted in despair.

All the other ladies knew each other very well, lived in the same circle, had the same pursuits, objects, interests. I, alone, shivered chilly outside the magic ring. I was like a ghost come back after the lapse of a century, to the house where he used to be lord and master and darling, who hears a language that he understands not. What did I know about the Duchess of A's at home? or dear Lady B's ball?

I who had never to my knowledge set eyes upon a duchess, and whose sole experience of balls was derived from the inglorious Infirmary Ball of our little county town. However, I looked with unshaken faith to the coming of the gentlemen for bettering my condition, and better it that coming certainly did. If I had expected indeed that my large new friend would make any demonstration in my favour, I was disappointed. He betook himself straightway to the piano, where a brilliant little brunette was trilling airy French songs in a voice like a bird's; there he stood with his back against the wall, now and then leaning forward to whisper two or three words into the pretty musician's ear, words that made the dark eyes sparkle more brightly than before.

I felt an insane desire to sing too; I *could* sing; it was the one accomplishment I possessed, but nobody requested the pleasure of hearing me warble; so I sat chafing, with my talent hid in a napkin. Then a quartett of old fogies sat down to whist, and cut, and dealt, and shuffled, and

abused their cards, and quarrelled with their partners, as irascible old gentlemen will; and other bald heads got into groups, and bragged about their short-horns to their hearts' content. And gradually the younger men sought out such women as seemed good in their eyes, and sat into their pockets, to the satisfaction of both parties; even dowdy I found favour in somebody's eyes.

Two or three men came and were introduced to me, and I attributed their notice to a praiseworthy feeling of compassion, having too unaffected a belief in my own ugliness to attribute it to any other motive. I tired my neck somewhat craning up at them as they stood black-legged around me, and they were very civil—one of them indeed, a jolly-looking, short, dark man, considerably past his *première jeunesse*, whom I had heard addressed as Sir Hugh, civiller far, as I now see, than the occasion required. While we were making our *adieux* to the hostess on our departure, King Olaf left his brunette and her little songs in praise of love and wine rather abruptly, and

gave me his arm to lead me to the carriage. We were in the hall alone together for a minute, and as he put my shawl round my shoulders he stooped and gazed full into my eyes. Innocent and childish as I was, I could not mistake that expression, bewildering me with its bold, avowed admiration.

"Will there be any use in my going to the churchyard to-morrow evening?" he asked hurriedly.

"I'm sure I don't know," said I, turning away coldly, "it's nothing to me whether you go there or not."

"Is it not? I'm sorry for that," he said gravely; and I was sorry too, as soon as the words were out of my mouth.

And then my father called me, and I ran hastily away, and left him standing under the portico, with the carriage lamps gilding his severe Greek beauty.

CHAPTER V.

"THE Federals have had another licking, Nell," said my father, in an exultant tone next morning, as I entered the dining-room, in my usual elegant morning *négligé* (and very *négligé* it was), and with my hands full of dear old-fashioned flowers, dark claret-coloured double gilly-flowers, great heavy heads of lilac, and bottles of colour.

"Have they?" said I; "Brutes! I'm so glad."

We were great politicians, my father and I, and I could have stood a very stiff examination in the battles of the American war. If I had been left to myself I do not think I should have cared very much whether the Confederates conjugated the active or passive voice of the verb "*to whip*." I should have listened with

equal indifference to the "tall doin's" of Abolitionists or Secessionists; but I was truly thankful for any subject of public interest which could rouse my father from his melancholy, and moreover I loved him so entirely that what interested him, interested me too, of necessity. There is no relationship so delightful as that between father and daughter when at its best. Some thought of this kind ran through my head as I sat eating my porridge, and occasionally glancing at my father, whose dear old head was half buried between two sheets of the *Times*. It prompted me to say:

"Papa, I sometimes feel inclined to wish that Dolly would never come back, that she would live always with those Graftons, who seem to appreciate her so much more than you and I do."

"You should not say that, Nell," said my father from the banks of the Potomac; but his rebuke was of the very mildest description.

"Why should not I say so, if I feel it?—you and I are so happy together, aren't we, daddy?"

"Yes, very happy," answered my father; but even as he spoke he sighed.

Sighs are the gales that blow us to heaven, I sometimes think; they breathe unconscious weariness of the "here," and longing for the "there."

"I should like," pursued I, "things always to be just as they are now; you and I living here together, for ever and ever and ever, with our pigs and our chickens and our cabbages, only we'd have no money matters, and nobody to trouble us."

"Your wants are nearly as few as Diogenes, Nell; indeed you haven't included a tub in your list of indispensables."

"You're my only indispensable, dad!"

"Poor little lass! you'll think differently some day when you've got a husband and children, and I'm dead and gone."

"When you're dead and gone," said I decisively, "I shall be dead and gone too, for I could not bear to live without you;" and I really believed it.

"Nonsense! child," said my father, smiling. "Did you ever see a stone

thrown into the pond? there's a great splash, and a few circles on the water, and that's about all, isn't it? Well, when I die there'll be a great splash of tears and hullaballooing, and a few circles of tender recollections, and then the surface will smooth itself over and it'll be all right again."

I was so overcome by this affecting metaphor, that a piece of porridge stuck in my weasand and all but choked me.

"Like the remembrance of a guest that tarrieth but a day," said my father over to himself, reflectively, leaning his head on his hand, "that's about our tether, Nell; wet pocket-handkerchiefs, and long faces for a day, and then somebody new springs up, and fills up our vacant hole in this odd ant-hill, and we're jostled away into the limbo where so many better and wiser have been bundled before us."

I am soft-hearted—easily moved to tears. I was blubbering gently behind the tea-kettle now.

"Crying, Nell!" says my father, roused from his reverie by my sniffs. "Come, child, I'm not dead yet; wait till my coffin

is ordered, before you set to making lamentations over me."

"You're ve-ve-ry d-d-is-agreeable," said I, with moist indignation, "I've a great mind never to say anything to you again. You're always bothering about dying. I wish to heaven there was not such a word in the dictionary."

"If there was not, it would be a very terrible world, Nell," replied my father, gravely; "every man with Cain's curse upon his brow."

"Do let us talk of something else," cried I, peevishly. "I hate such moping sort of subjects."

"By all means; something gay and festive. The party last night, for instance," said the author of my being, ironically.

"It was not so bad as I expected," returned I, brightening up, and eradicating the moisture from my eyes with my knuckles.

"How did you get on with all those fine ladies?" inquired my father, kindly.

"Middling," said I, "I did not care much about them; I liked the men better.

If I went into society, I should like to go to parties where there were no women, only men."

"That is a sentiment that I think I should keep for home use, my dear, if I were you."

"Should you? Well, perhaps so; but women are so prying and censorious. All the time you are talking to them you feel sure that they are criticising the sit of your tucker, and calculating how much a yard your dress cost. Now, if you're only pretty and pleasant,—indeed, even if you're not either (I mentally classed myself under this latter head),—men are good-natured and take you as they find you, and make the best of you."

My father did not dispute my position.

"Talking of men," said he, "that Sir Hugh Lancaster seems to be a very nice young fellow; he and I had a great deal of talk together."

"Do you mean that little black man you introduced to me?" inquired I, contemptuously. "Young fellow, indeed! Well, if he's a young fellow, Methuselah was rather juvenile than otherwise."

My father sipped his coffee reflectively.

"Poor Methuselah," said he, "nine hundred and sixty-six years he had of it, hadn't he? How sick he must have been of the eternal millround—seed-time and harvest, summer and winter coming back near a thousand times, to find him hanging on still!"

I had nothing to suggest on the subject of the patriarch, so I held my peace.

"Did he do nothing worth recording all those ten centuries?" went on my father musingly, "that we're told of him only that he was born, and begat sons and daughters, and died."

"You've wandered some way from Sir What's-his-name, pa," said I, recalling my parent's spirit from the realms of barren speculations whither it had travelled.

"I'll come back to him, my dear, if you wish; only I don't think I know much more about him than I do about his prototype, Methuselah!"

"And to my thinking, he's hardly more interesting," added I, with which scant courtesy I dismissed the worthy baronet from my conversation and my thoughts.

I had often heard other motherless girls deploring their destitute condition; envying such of their friends as were in the enjoyment of a mother's care and supervision; but such sentiments, such regrets met no echo in my heart—but rather inspired me with strongest surprise and amazement. It was to me a matter of unfeigned and heartfelt gratulation that my mother had died in my infancy. As often as I came in contact with well-drilled daughters, nestling under the wing of a portly mamma, I hugged myself on my freedom; my father was more to me than ten mothers. If my mother had lived, thought I, I should have been only second in his affections, some one else would have been nearer his heart than I—an idea almost too bitter to be contemplated. If I had had a mother, I should have had to mend my gloves, and keep my hair tidy, and practise on the piano, and be initiated into the mysteries of stitching. My mother had been among the fortunate of the earth, having died while yet young and fair, and passionately loved, before the world had grown tired of her, or she of it. In the early

morning of her life, ere the glow of prime had faded,

> "The Almighty's breath spake out in death,
> And God did draw Honora up
> The golden stairs to Heaven."

Her name, I may mention incidentally, was not Honora, but it would spoil a very lovely line to introduce her real cognomen of Dorothy into it, so I have ceded to the necessity which makes Anthony White appear for ever as Anthony Blue on his tombstone.

Devoted as I was to my father, I could not always be with him; sometimes he preferred his own society and that of his books to mine, found more solace for his vexations in epigrammatic French essayists and German metaphysicians, whose rhapsodies about the beautiful and the sublime I could make neither head nor tail of, to my girlish cackle. Sometimes, but more rarely, he took long solitary rides about his heavily mortgaged farms on a sedate old cob, with a docked tail and hogged mane, who, like his master, had seen better days. The soft May wind, and the invitations of the garrulous black-

birds and thrushes, had tempted him to set forth on such a ride one evening after tea, two days after my introduction to society. Consequently I was thrown on my own resources, and rather short of a job I was.

If I had followed my inclination, I should have betaken myself to the churchyard, to see whether my stranger might not be there again, as he had hinted (not dimly) that he might be, but two considerations checked me. If, on the one hand, he were to be there, I could not look him in the face for shame, and if, on the other hand, he were not—if I were to go to meet him, and he were not to be met—if I were to seek him, and he were not to be found, what words could express my degradation? Even if there had been no new charm about the fair old graveyard sloping westwards, the old one would have been quite strong enough to draw my heart and myself thither. I liked to go there in the soundless gloaming, and think of all sorts of grave dark things. When one is very young and very happy, one courts melancholy thoughts for the sake

of the contrast they afford to one's own inner life; in later days, such thoughts are less coy, need no courting, but run to meet us, embrace, and cling about us, even when we could well dispense with the pleasure of their society. But in youth, when the blood is rioting through the veins, life seems so strong within us as to be almost able to challenge the old scythesman to single combat, and to worst him. At nineteen, death seems so immeasurably distant, we may have so many miles of pleasant pasture-land and shady woodland to traverse before we dip our feet in the inky stream, into which whosoever steppeth straightway

"He forgets the days before."

I was fond of sitting among those mossy headstones, speculating on the for-ever-ended histories of those dead people—those uneducated churls, who had been so below me in intelligence while alive, now so immeasurably above me in the knowledge that there is but one way of attaining to; fond, too, was I of marvelling after what various fashions they had

battled through their lives; with what different degrees of apathy, despair, and heaven-born faith they had confronted him whom some call foe, some friend. But the churchyard, and its attendant reveries being out of the question, I had to cast about for other occupation—occupation of a more practical kind. Our garden, as I have said, was a very wilderness. Chickweed and groundsel, and other abominations, intruded their plebeian heads among my crown imperials and sweet nancies,—even tried to choke the nemophilas that were just opening their azure eyes, mirroring the sky. I stooped to dislodge a thistle which had impertinently insinuated itself into a bunch of sweetwilliams.

"I may as well garden a bit," I said to myself; "it will pass the time, and oh! how slow it is going now, even though I did put on all the clocks half an hour." So I fetched a pair of gardening gloves and a little mat, knelt down on the latter, and set to digging, and raking, and weeding with a will. It is pleasant to feel one's self useful, and doing some

good in one's generation, and I, being ordinarily anything but a busy bee, found that to be laudably industrious was a new and delightful sensation. And as I grubbed, and watered, and scuffled, I ran over in my mind all the little incidents of my late dissipation, composed smart answers and brilliant repartees, which I might have made and had not at various points of my conversation with the gray-eyed stranger, and wondered, for the twentieth time, what he could have meant by staring at me as he had done under the gaslight in the hall. "Could he have thought me pretty?" I asked myself at last, being unable to find any other explanation for that long eager gaze, the remembrance of which still stirred my silly little soul in the newest, queerest, joyfullest fashion.

At this preposterous suggestion I raised myself from my stooping attitude, dropped my trowel, and pushed back the flapping wide-leaved hat from my hot forehead. "Impossible!" said I. "Pretty, indeed! after what Dolly said, and Dolly's a good judge, ill-natured as she is! Nothing more

unlikely. Certainly, living such a secluded life makes one magnify trifles, make mountains of molehills. I'm afraid, my good girl, that you are a sad fool!" These last words I spoke aloud, little thinking that I had any other auditors than the columbines and the damask roses which I had been tying up. Judge then of my surprise when my self-complimenting remark found itself answered. Somebody close at my elbow said, "Are you? I should not have thought it." I started as if a bullet had hit me, sprang to my feet, and confronted the object of my conjectures. There he stood, tall and straight, and strong as a young oak, on the gravel walk, between the prim box edgings, smiling broadly at my discomfiture.

"I'm sorry you have such a poor opinion of yourself," he continued, maliciously enjoying my confusion.

I made no answer to this remark, but struggled violently to compose myself, and to recollect how much I had said aloud; whether only the last clause of my sentence, which was comparatively harmless, or enough to have disgraced me for ever.

"Won't you ask me how I am? Won't you shake hands with me this evening, Miss Lestrange?" inquired my tormentor, resuming his gravity.

"I'm afraid I cannot," responded I, laughing constrainedly, holding up my hands in their earthly coverings to show him.

"I have no objection whatever to a little dirt; it's rather wholesome than otherwise, and I have tender reminiscences of the dirt pies of my youth."

I drew off my gauntlet with precipitation, and laid my hand (a long slim member) in his.

"It was rather cool of me, coming in here without anybody inviting me?" he asked, detaining my not unwilling, though rather embarrassed fingers, holding them as if he had forgotten all about them, and looking down (for though I was rather a tall girl, beside him I was small and short enough) at me.

"Oh no!" said I, "it did not matter at all, only you startled me rather."

"Did I? I'm so sorry; but you see I was just toddling about that field over

there, in the most pitiable state, when I caught sight of some one (I felt sure it was you) burrowing in the ground, and I could not resist the temptation of coming to speak to you; a friendly human shape is a sight not to be despised in this desolate country. I could not throw away such a chance."

"Could you not?"

"Could you not?" said he, repeating my words rather reproachfully. "So that's all you've got to say to me? Why are you so hard, and cold, and stiff?"

"I don't mean to be," said I, naïvely, and I did not.

At this juncture my hat fell off the back of my head, and he had to release my hand to pick it up. Having restored my head-piece, he resumed—

"Why were you so cross the other night?"

"I was not cross."

"Yes, you were; very cross. I never saw any one more cross. I could not conceive how I had vexed you; I asked myself a dozen times after you were gone, what can I have said to make that young lady so

angry with me; only I'm afraid I did not say *that young lady.*"

"What did you say?" asked I, with female inquisitiveness.

"Never mind what I said. I did not call you by your name, for I did not know what it was, nor don't now; would you mind telling me what it is?"

"Nell."

"Nell! Nell! I like it; but were you christened *Nell?*"

"No-o-o," said I, dubiously. "I suppose not; I suppose I was christened Ellinor, but nobody but the servants ever call me so. What's your name?"

"Richard."

"Richard what?"

"Richard Harold."

"Richard Harold what?"

"Oh! you mean what's my surname? M'Gregor. I thought you knew that."

"No, I did not," said I.

Pretty names, I remarked to myself; but I like *Olaf* better; it's much more descriptive. I knelt down on my mat, and prepared to resume my gardening. But Richard Harold M'Gregor remonstrated.

"Please don't do any more of that horrid rooting and scraping," said he, seizing my trowel, and holding it high out of my reach; "you have made yourself quite hot already. Do come and sit down on that stone bench, and talk a bit; have pity on a poor fellow who is dying for some one to exchange ideas with."

"I have nothing to say," responded I, but I complied with his request without any demur, and sat down on the old bench with the little green mosses and lichens in the crevices of the cracked stone, while he stretched his lazy length at my feet.

"And so you spend your life in this rum old garden, do you?" inquired he, looking round, and taking a comprehensive survey of our roses and cabbages and gooseberry bushes, all growing in friendly proximity.

"Yes," said I, "here, and in the house, and among the chickens."

"Rather dreary work, isn't it?" asked he, thinking, I fancy, what a contrast his own existence was to mine.

"I don't find it so," said I.

"In fact, you like it better than any other kind of life, I suppose."

"I never tried any other, so I cannot tell," responded I, sagely. "I should not like any life away from papa."

"You're very fond of him then?" he asked, and I fancied I heard him mutter something like "lucky old beggar," under his breath.

"I should think so," replied I, emphatically.

"You cannot fancy ever being fonder of any one else, I suppose?" he inquired, pulling a blade of grass, and biting it.

"No-o-o, I think not," I answered cautiously.

"I wish *I* had anybody to love me like that," said he, looking wistfully up in my face.

Of course he meant some sister, or mother, or friend, and of course I took it so; but innocent as my heart was, my detestable cheeks thought it necessary to hang out their ever ready flame-signals again, giving me completely the air of having misunderstood his meaning, and being in the expectation of hearing him

in his next sentence request the gift of my valuable affections. He was charitable; looked away, and ate more grass. Having given my cheeks time to cool, he looked round again.

"I think you and I should get on together," said he; "don't you?"

I nodded my head. "I think so," I said, nibbling a daisy stalk.

"Shall we make a solemn league and covenant? shall we settle to be friends henceforth and for ever?" he asked.

I was rather taken aback by such suddenness of action.

"I don't know about that," I said, hesitatingly; "it would be rather awkward if, after having taken me for your friend, you found I was not so nice as you thought me."

I took it for granted, in my innocence, that he *did* think me nice. He laughed.

"Not so nice as I thought—eh?" said he. "Well, I don't think I mind running the risk if you'll do as much for me. Life is too short to waste in preliminaries."

"It *is* short," said I, sententiously.

"Horribly short!" replied he, with a

sigh; "and if I like you and you like me, as I hope you do. *Do* you, by-the-by?"

He raised himself on his elbow till his face was on a level with my knee, and awaited my answer.

"Yes, I do," I said, slowly; "what I know of you, at least—that is not much."

"Give me your hand, then, to seal our contract."

I felt rather flustered by the rapid strides our acquaintance had made within the last ten minutes; but I gave him my hand, and as I did so, my father, my adored papa, appeared round the corner. As he caught sight of the pretty *tableau vivant* we had kindly got up in his garden to surprise him, he looked extremely astonished and considerably displeased. Nor was the poor man much to blame, I think, finding his favourite daughter sitting in the dusk of the evening with a man, whom, to his certain knowledge, she had seen but twice before in her life, lying at her feet and clasping her hand, apparently unforbidden. It is rather a truism to say

that things that occur seldom impress us a great deal more than things that occur frequently. If there were a thunderstorm or an earthquake every day we should think nothing of those catastrophes. It was so very rarely that my father was angry with me, that I was in a state of proportionable awe and wholesome fear when such a *contretemps* did arise. I snatched away my hand and jumped up.

"Papa's coming," I gasped.

Mr., or as I afterwards heard he was, Major M'Gregor, did not appear much discomfited. He raised himself from his reclining posture, and went to meet my father. The latter on his part raised his hat very stiffly, and said, with a polite elaboration and distinctness which I thought very unnecessary, "How do you do, Sir? This is a most unexpected pleasure. May I take the liberty of asking your name?"

"My name is M'Gregor," said Richard, taking off his hat also, but not stiffly, and reddening a little, "and I must apologize for coming at such an untimely hour, but the fact was, Mrs. Coxe in-

trusted me with a message to your daughter, and after I had delivered it I took the liberty of asking to be allowed to see your garden, of which I had heard so much, and which Miss Lestrange was kind enough to show me."

A tissue of fibs, listened to by me with open-mouthed, wide-eyed amazement. Could my hero tell lies? My father did not seem mollified. He said "Humph!" very gruffly, planted himself in the middle of the path between me and the stranger, and looked ostentatiously at his watch, as much as to say, "When is the fellow thinking of taking himself off?"

The *fellow* took the broad hint. "I'm detaining you," said he, politely; and after turning to me, and saying, with a fund of amusement in his face, "I hope you won't forget Mrs. Coxe's message," he again lifted his hat and walked away.

Papa and I followed slowly in his wake, I quaking, yet angry. My father was the first to speak.

"I don't like this sort of thing at all," said he, with irritation, "and what's more, it must not occur again. You're very

young and inexperienced, Nell, and I dare say you meant no harm, but I wonder that even *you* did not think it was not very nice or maidenly to be out at nine o'clock at night with that big fellow sprawling at your feet, to say nothing of holding your hand!"

I felt disposed to weep, till he came to the word *sprawling*; that obnoxious dissyllable made me choke back my indignant tears.

"What was he doing with your hand?" pursued my father, still more severely.

"I'm sure I don't know," stammered I. "I suppose he was going to bid me good-by."

I really had not strength of mind to reveal the truth and expose the folly I had been guilty of, with regard to that most absurd proposition of friendship.

"Puppy!" exclaimed my father, fuming and working himself up into a passion. "He wants a good kicking, that's what he does. Uncommon free and easy, indeed! Walking into another man's garden, without saying '*by* your leave,' or '*with* your leave!' Those may be Man-

chester or Brummagem manners, but they won't go down here, I can tell him."

"He is not Manchester or Brummagem," said I, gasping, and without the slightest feeling of the ridiculous.

"Well, Brummagem or no," retorted my father, "he won't come here again in a hurry I can tell him!" and he stopped and struck his stick upon the ground to emphasize his remark.

"I should not think he'd wish to do so, after the way you treated him," I could not help saying.

"Perhaps not, perhaps not! So much the better!" replied my father, still at boiling point.

We had by this time reached the house. I stalked upstairs, with my head up, and on reaching my room, threw myself on my bed, in a passion of mortified angry tears.

I "unmaidenly," and he "Brummagem!" Which epithet was worst?

CHAPTER VI.

I HAVE lived now more than twenty years, and have seen much of the evil and much of the good (there is a good deal of the latter, after all) that there is in the world. I have often been led to ponder upon the comparative bearableness or unbearableness of the various burdens laid upon the shoulders of poor humanity. After much deliberation, after changing my opinion five or six times: after looking at the subject from every point of view; after considering all the *pros* and *cons*, counting one by one, as the Preacher says, I have come to the conclusion that the heaviest load under which man groans is poverty. By poverty I do not mean comfortable, decent poverty, which pays ready money, which keeps a parlour-maid instead of butler and footman, which walks instead of drives, buys cotton gowns instead of silk dresses for its

wife, which sends its sons to Cheltenham and Cambridge, instead of Eton and Christ Church; but the bugbear I have before me is poverty such as ours was—the poverty of living in a wide house—not with a brawling woman—but worse, with a very narrow income; the poverty which dares not look on from month to month and from day to day, before whose inner eyes bum-bailiffs are ever present; the poverty which steals away our cheerful spirits; which renders us envious, and spiteful, and sordid; which makes our days a long torture, and our nights a long vigil; which saps the springs of our life, and sometimes ends by making us cut our throats to escape it! The death of friends is a far sharper grief, of course, while it lasts: then the light goes out in the heavens, and we sit among the ashes and curse the day in which we were born; but the people whom we love *intensely*, whose existence or non-existence is of any very vital importance to our daily happiness, are so extremely few, that such devouring sorrows come ordinarily but three or four times in a life of sixty years. A sharp

stab at rare intervals is better than a running sore festering perpetually.

On the morning after my unmaidenly behaviour, I was in the hall of our old house, and the morning sun was shining through the stained glass windows (through Abel's head and Cain's legs, queerly depicted thereon) on the faded Turkey carpet. As usual, I was sitting on the floor; I had a big darning-needle between my fingers, and was slowly and unskilfully mending stockings. It was an occupation I particularly disliked; it was a real penance to me; but having no lady's maid, I had to undergo it weekly. And as I darned and pricked myself, and grumbled at fate, I heard a door which led to the offices creak on its hinges, and saw a head peer inquiringly round it—the head of our old cook and housekeeper. She had been with us twenty years; she was as good a soul as ever trussed a chicken or concocted *entremets*, and I loved her; but at the present moment she was to me a most unwelcome apparition. I had already ordered dinner, so I knew she could have come with but one fell object, namely,

to get money for some of the numerous tradesmen who were *kind* enough to throng our doors.

"If your please, 'm, I want to speak to you," said the head, cautiously.

"Do you?" said I, with a sickening heart. "Come in then, there's nobody here."

Thus reassured, the head and the body that belonged to it, came forward into the room, and both together stood before me—sleek, middle-aged, like a respectable tabby.

"Well?" said I, looking up from amid my hose, "what is it?"

"If you please, 'm, the butcher" (she pronounced the word as if the first syllable were the preposition *but*) "has come."

"Oh, indeed! How kind of him!" said I.

"Yes, 'm, he has; and he has not brought the right piece of beef. If you remember, you ordered the ribs, and he has brought the sir-*line*; he never brings us the prime pieces now either; he says he has to keep 'em for his larger customers."

"It cannot be helped," said I, resignedly. At nineteen, sirloin or ribs are indifferent to one.

"That's not all, 'm; I'm sorry to say," pursued Mrs. Smith, rather aggravated by my stoicism, "he's brought his bill again."

"I wish he and his bill were at Jericho," responded I, tartly.

"He says that this is the ninth time he has brought it in, and he wants to have it paid."

"Want must be his master," said I, briefly.

"But he says he *must* have it paid; that he's got a very 'eavy engagement to meet next week, and he cannot do without the money."

"They always say that," replied I, surveying ruefully a yawning chasm in the heel of my stocking.

"Indeed, 'm, I think they do; but, if you please, what am I to tell him? he's waiting."

"Tell him that I shall be most happy to pay his bill if he'll only show me how; that I cannot coin money, and I haven't got a farthing in the world, except the crooked sixpence on my chain, which he is most welcome to, if he likes to take it."

"I'm afraid I could not tell him that," 'm; but if you could manage to give him just a little something towards it—just to put him off a bit."

"I tell you it's out of the question," said I, eagerly. "I'm telling you the literal truth; I have not got a halfpenny in the world. I gave you my last shilling last week, for that man who came with coals; and papa told me he could not give me any more till the end of next month."

"Eh, dear! it's a bad job—a bad job!" moaned our *chef de cuisine*, shaking her elderly head; "and I don't 'alf like going back empty-handed to the man—he's none too civil, I can tell you!"

"None too civil! isn't he?" exclaimed I, indignantly, regardless of grammar. "The wretch! why don't you turn him out of the house?"

But Mrs. Smith's sense of justice revolted against this ladylike proposition.

"Nay, my dear," said she, mildly remonstrative, "we could not quite do that, I'm thinking. After all, the man's only come to look after his own, and if we was to turn him out o' doors, a pretty cha-

racter he'd give of us, all over the place! Why, we should have the whole lot on 'em about our ears afore you could say Jack Robis'n!"

We remained silent a minute or two, Mrs. Smith rubbing her chin reflectively, as if to gain inspiration from that feature, or features — for she had two of them, while wild ideas of writing a book, for which emulous publishers should outbid each other, of marrying a certain snuffy old bachelor uncle of the Coxes, and making him settle three-fourths of his income on papa, coursed through my brain. At last Mrs. Smith spoke:

"My dear, would you mind speaking to your papa about it?"

I interrupted her.

"I should mind very much; I don't know anything I should mind much more."

"Well 'm, you know something must be done, and perhaps he has got some money you don't know of—just a trifle would do, to stop the man's mouth for the present, and there's no harm in asking. *Do* now; there's a dear young lady. There he goes

down the garden. Eh, dear! he stoops sadly of late."

"I *won't*," said I, vehemently, "and that's flat. He's in very bad spirits this morning as it is, and I won't do anything to add to his annoyances if I can help it. I'll see you, and the butcher too, at the bottom of the Red Sea first."

Baffled in her little plan, Mrs. Smith stood the image of black despair in a lilac cotton gown, and bumbailiffs crowded thick and fast before my mind's eye. At last I said, gulping down my pride:

"Mrs. Smith, don't you think that if you were to go to him, and tell him that we are very sorry, but that we really don't happen to have any money by us at present, and if you were to speak very civilly to him, don't you think you might persuade him to wait till next week? by next week," said I, resolutely, "I'll get the money as sure as I sit here, by hook or by crook."

"I can but try," she answered, being the essence of good-nature; "but I'm sadly afraid it won't be no good."

She disappeared despondent behind the

swing-door, and I went back to my darning. Duns were such every-day visitors, that as long as I could keep them away from papa I bore their attentions with tolerable equanimity. After a considerable interval my messenger returned, with her visage somewhat shortened.

"Well?" said I, interrogatively.

"He's gone, 'm, drabbit 'im!" said she, with her one little pet imprecation—an imprecation which always rather puzzled me as to its precise signification, etymology, and derivation. What awful malediction was contained in the imperative mood of the verb "to drabbit!" "I've got him out of the house at last, though, indeed, I had hard work to manage it. He cuss'd and swore above a bit, that he did. I was ashamed out of my life that them girls should hear him; and he said, said he, 'Mrs. Smith,' said he, 'there's not another man in all ——shire as u'd a been as patient and forbearin' as I've been,' said he; and here's his bill, 'm; he desired me pertikler to give it into your own 'ands."

I took it; £34 5*s*. 4½*d*.

"The halfpenny be demmed," said I,

with dreary jocularity, quoting Mr. Mantalini. "Well, will he wait till next week?"

"Not he, 'm; he would not hear tell of it nohow; he's coming again on Tuesday; he'd a come on Monday, only it's Nantford fair, and he says if he don't get his bill settled satisfactorily then, he'll go straight off to the master and 'ave it out with him."

"Pleasant!" said I, ironically. "I wish he and the baker and the candlestickmaker may all come to some horrible end soon, that I do! Spontaneous combustion, or something of the sort. They are the bane of my existence!"

However, I had got a reprieve, though a very short one; it's better to be going to be hanged to-morrow, than to be hanged to-day. I was young and possessed of boundless spirits, which, when the immediate pressure of any anxiety was removed, rose elastic as an india-rubber ball, trusting implicitly in something turning up. I am bound to admit that nothing ever did turn up, but that did not lessen my faith in the *potentialities*, as Carlyle would call them, of the future.

CHAPTER VII.

THIRTY-FOUR pounds, five shillings, and fourpence halfpenny is a large sum for a person without present income or future prospects, to procure within three days. So I thought as I sat through that long forenoon, racking my brains to find out ways and means for obtaining that sum, or even a part of it. But I racked my brains in vain; no inspiration came to them; nothing turned up. I had nobody that I could borrow or hope to borrow from. I was, it is true possessed of two well-to-do aunts, but they were vestals of the stingiest, who as long as I could remember anything, had never given me or Dolly a farthing's worth, with the exception of two bone brooches, coloured crimson, and representing fruit and flowers; brooches vast in size, but infinitesimal in value, and which they had borne all the way, across sea and land, from Rome for us, as characteristic mementoes

of the Eternal City. I felt that I had rather die than be beholden to their niggard charity.

I ran over in my mind all my few poor worldly possessions, to find something vendible among them; but to no purpose. I had no jewels, Dolly having appropriated all our mother's ornaments, before I was of an age to care much whether she appropriated them or not. The sole thing which I possessed that could by any possibility be worth more than a few shillings, was a large unwieldy old watch, which had belonged to my maternal grandmother—a watch with a jewelled case with queer figures chased in gold upon it, and which I wore every day for want of a better, though it kept a time of its own, or, as often as not, no time at all. The idea of selling this ancient timepiece did occur to me, but I dismissed it as impossible. Who would buy such an old warming-pan? and, moreover, who should I see to offer it to?

As the hours stole on I grew very downhearted. Tuesday morning would be here directly, and with it the Furies, in the shape of that accursed butcher in his blue blouse.

Despite all my anxious precautions, he would get access to my dear old father, and would dun and torment him, and make him even more miserable than he was now, though, God knows, there was no need for that.

My father and I had by this time quite made up our little differences; we never could be at war with one another for more than an hour, and we had taken our diurnal stroll about the premises, to inspect the stock, and say what we had said yesterday, and what we should say to-morrow about it. We had thought the red cow looking invalidish, and had ordered her a bran mash; we had, in imagination, sold five or six of our best porkers, and got fabulous prices for them; we had doomed the black pullets to an untimely death, and had administered his daily carrot to the old gray cob. And now my father had gone back to his books, and there would be no tearing him away from them for the rest of that day.

We dined at one, and did not have tea till eight; so that the afternoon spread in rather dreary perspective before my

mind's eye; rather an inconveniently long period of time for a young lady, who had no more pleasing occupation than that of meditating on her own and her father's liabilities.

It was an oppressive, sultry sort of day, rather depressing to the spirits. The sun had gone out of sight somewhere, though there did not appear to be any particular cloud to hide him; and a dim, dull haze, which might be prophetic of either thunder, blight, or increased heat, enveloped all except the nearest objects. It was stifling in the house, and I betook myself to the garden, and strolled rather disconsolately between the luxuriant borders. But the garden did not please me to-day, I seemed to know every twig in it so intimately. I had not energy for gardening, and, moreover, had memories connected with my last essay in that line which I did not care to dwell upon.

A low fence divided our grounds from a field of green corn, and over this fence I climbed, and sauntered through the young barley to a small fir wood at the other side of it. Ordinarily, I was not

fond of taking solitary walks, having a wholesome fear of beggarmen, loose horses, &c.; but I did not dread an encounter with any such alarming objects among those tall quiet pines. It was very cool and shady there, and I enjoyed looking through the long vista of tree aisles and arches, without any brambles or brushwood to obstruct my view; while the fallen pine needles made a pleasant carpet for my feet.

Beyond the wood, was a meadow all a-blaze with buttercups, and beyond it a garrulous brook, which was the bound of my walk. Arrived here, I sat down in the grass on the hither side, and thought of the butcher. A little rude handbridge led over the hurrying, chattering stream, and on the other side of it, right opposite to me, rose a mill, and an old farmhouse, with a range of straw beehives and a plat of blue borage under the diamond-paned windows, beside it. The mill was at work, and the water came plunging and dashing and sparkling over the big wheel, as it turned round, dripping. I love a millwheel, and could watch it for ever;

my eyes followed it now with a sort of fascination, as it moved round and round interminably, with a noise, though loud, yet eminently soothing.

My attention was distracted by a little flock of yellow velvet chickens, coming pecketting down to the water's edge, with the old hen clucking fussily in the midst of them. Then the miller's wife came out with a bowl of something in her hand, and threw handfuls to them, and I wondered whether she fed her chickens on the same things that we did ours; and then three large white ducks came swimming down the stream, paddling and quacking, and diving their sleek heads under water. But after a while the chickens wandered, scratching and picking, out of sight; the miller's wife went indoors, and I got tired of watching the ducks stand upon their heads. I yawned, and took one last glance down stream, before rising to go home.

Some way down on the other side, I spied a man making his way through the thick alders—a man in brown velveteen, with a fishing-rod in his hand. During

the last few days, my heart had taken to thumping loudly whenever I saw a man in the distance, opining that it might be my new friend; and consequently I had had to submit to severe disappointment as often as my hero turned out to be a game-keeper, a day labourer, or even a cowman. The seat of my affections gave its usual thud against my ribs now, and this time it was justified in so doing; the man was Major M'Gregor. Presently he emerged from the alders, looking rather hot. Then he came over the ricketty bridge, smiling. He looked very goodly, and I thought so. To this day I think he was

"The goodliest man that ever among ladies ate in hall;"

and most assuredly I thought so that day, when

"I lifted up mine eyes,
And loved him with that love that was my doom;"

for love him I did, though I have not said much about it, as it is no use dwelling on unpleasant truths.

Like a little fool as I was, I pretended not to see him, and turned my head, surmounted by its ragged brown hat, perse-

veringly down stream, and tried to appear immersed in the contemplation of the trout leaping half their own length out of the water, after the flies under the dipping elders, and then flopping back again. But all the same; I need hardly say that I heard his feet coming through the long sweet grass, as plainly as ever I heard cannon-ball or thunderclap.

"De do, Miss Lestrange?" said a jolly voice beside me, abbreviating the Briton's customary greeting to his fellow, after the manner of the young.

The brown hat and the reddened face it shaded veered round from the study of the trout, and two youthful and embarrassed lips responded, "How do you do?" in return, and a ladylike hand, in a most unladylike glove, perforated with many holes, went out to meet Major M'Gregor's large one—went out shyly but gladly.

"I hope you did not intend to cut me," said he, laughing; "you looked away so perseveringly when I took off my hat to you on the other side, that I felt almost afraid of coming near you."

"I did not see you," I began, hastily;

"at least—at least" and there I stopped, having expressed myself with my usual lucid coherency, and being fully aware of it.

"Well, never mind!" said he, good-naturedly, trying to put me at my ease. "I'll forgive you, if you did mean to cut me, on condition that you won't send me away now," and a pair of dark honest gray eyes looked at me, in a beseeching and insinuating manner, to which at Lestrange Hall I had not been accustomed, and which I thought pleasant, though extremely odd. I plucked up my spirits, and determined to revolt against the dominion of gawkiness, and be sprightly.

"I could not send you away, if I had wished ever so much," said I. "This meadow is not mine, nor yet the grass nor the buttercups: you have as much right to be here, I suppose, as I have."

"But do you wish to send me away?" Silence. "*Do* you, Miss Lestrange?" Silence still. "*Do* you?" rather impatiently, bending down to look at my face.

I perceived his eagerness, and was

elated by it. He wished me to say "No," so I would say "Yes." A spirit of graceful contradiction entered into me. Why should I not be *agaçante*, and *espiègle*, and two or three other nice French adjectives whose exact meaning I should have been puzzled to define. So I looked up into his anxious countenance, and said laughingly:

"Yes, I do wish to send you away."

"All right," said he, calmly; "then I'll go," and he picked up the fishing-rod he had tossed down on the grass, took off his hat, and went.

I have experienced a good many moments of mortification in my life—of course we all have—but I doubt whether I ever felt one more bitter, or more completely undiluted by any dash of sweetness. This was the result of my archness then. Why, oh why had not I kept to my native stupidity? I had got on much better then. When I attempted to be funny, it was like a cow standing on her hind legs—nobody could understand what she would be after.

In the impulse of the moment, I sprang to my feet, intending to run after him,

but I was held back by the remembrance of my mature age, and of what the best of fathers would say, were he to see me coursing round the big field after the "Brummagem young man," to whom he had so strong an objection. So I sank down on the grass again, and the silly tears stole into my eyes as I watched my Richard walking huffily off, without looking once back at me. He did not walk particularly well, but much as dismounted dragoons usually do; but to me his gait seemed that of an offended angel.

The trout might have leaped up into the trees above them, and sat there singing, for all the notice I should have taken of them now. A faint hope lingered in my breast that he might relent—might come back—that I might see him pushing through the elders, and the wych-elms again; and in this hope I stayed there disconsolate till the dew fell, and the flowers went to sleep, and the June moon came up behind the fir wood. There I sat, thinking of dear, dear Richard, and of the butcher, and weeping over them both.

That was Saturday; need I say that next

day was Sunday—a day on which most people dine early, and many people have roast beef for dinner. Morning service at Lestrange Church began at eleven, and commenced with a hymn, which I led. My voice, as I said once before, was my strongest point—my strongest but one, perhaps. On mature deliberation, I think that my eyes were my strongest. Anyhow, it was a rich, full contralto, and some of the low notes were, I flattered myself, almost as deep as those of a man.

Our choir was not large: it consisted of myself, two or three of our servants, who laboured under a fear of making too much noise, and consequently did not make enough; the clerk, and a young carpenter, who was too ambitious of introducing turns and trills and flourishes of his own composition into the simple old tunes. Often and often had I seen fit to skirmish with that too enterprising artificer. The church had two doors; a large and a little one; the large one, by which the bulk of the congregation came in; and a small one, by which we and two or three farmers' families made our dignified entrance. In this hot

weather both doors stood wide open, and the doorways made frames for pretty little pictures of waving tree-boughs, of weather-worn stone crosses, and of daisies, opening their pink fringes upon the

"Grassy barrows of the happier dead."

Exactly opposite the little door was our square pew, with its faded red moreen, which the morning sun was trying to fade still more; with Sir Lovelace Lestrange's black and white marble monument glooming above it, and with many Sir Lovelaces, Sir Adrians, and Sir Brians sleeping beneath it. I had stood up, had cleared my throat, and had struck up the first line of "Jerusalem the golden." I loved that tune, it was so sweet, and so triumphant.

"I know not; oh, I know not,"

sang I loud and clear, while the birds outside tried to rival me; and as I sang, a tall fair-haired stranger stooped his head, and came in at the low door, close to me. For a moment I felt as if I must give up "Jerusalem the golden" altogether—abandon it to the tender mercies of the trilling, rou-

lading carpenter; but I mastered myself. I must go on, though twenty yellow-haired majors came trooping through the church portals. When we feel that a thing must be done, we generally do it.

"What radiancy of glory;
What bliss beyond compare,"

sang I, stronger and clearer than ever. I poured my whole soul into my voice. Love and excitement supplied the place of devotion. He should hear how I *could* sing, thought I, remembering that objectionable brunette at the Coxe's party, and her pretty little treble squeak.

As I laid down my hymn-book at the conclusion of the hymn, I felt that a casual observer would find some little difficulty in distinguishing which were my cheeks and which were the red roses in my bonnet. I did not yield to the temptation of taking one look, long or short, at the lion-hearted Richard (lion-hearted is thus a second time braving my revered father), but I knew by instinct that he was in a pew over against me, in which Mr. Harris of the Home Farm had charitably given him a corner.

I did not look at or towards him, and I tried honestly not to think of him—tried hard to be as sorry for my sins as I said I was—tried to implore from that God who was to me then but a dim awful abstraction, those good things for my soul, without which that soul would be so cold, so naked, so famishing—tried to remember of how infinitesimally little account Richard M'Gregor and his beauty would be to me at the Judgment Day.

Often and often had I terrified myself with too vivid pictures of Death and Judgment as I lay wakeful on my bed, in my dark room at night; but here in the full blaze of the summer sun, I could summon but faint shadows, indistinct reflections of such pictures before my mind's eye; here youth and joy and love seemed dominant, and to keep all darker powers, baffled and worsted, in the background. So I buried my head in my big old prayer-book, which had a dried pansy between the two of its leaves, and a squashed fly between the other two, and caught myself praying earnestly, seriously, devoutly, for Queen Charlotte, the Prince Regent, and

all the Royal family. I had mentally resolved that morning to abstain during the day of rest from all harassing thoughts of Mr. Jenkins the butcher. Monday should be dedicated to the consideration of ways and means, to the begging, borrowing, or stealing that obnoxious sum of £34 5*s.* 4½*d.* But to-day I would be free from sordid cares; I would try to keep my mind clear and clean from worldly thoughts. And I was moderately successful, as far as regards the butcher. But it was a very different matter when I endeavoured to close the doors of my mind against Richard; to observe the Sabbath strictly in my heart; his image pushed the door of that sanctuary *sans façon*, and dwelt there, defying expulsion, during the long morning service.

All through the sermon I looked forward with childish impatience to the meeting in the churchyard, which seemed to me almost unavoidable. I pictured to myself how we three should stand in the church path under the ash tree. Papa rather grim at first, but thawing fast into his usual natural, dear old hearty manner; I, bashful

and somewhat gawky, I feared, but in the seventh heaven; and Richard——

"Perhaps," thought I, exultantly, "papa will ask him to luncheon, and if he does," subjoined cold reflection, "there's nothing but that cold mutton bone." This last dismal idea lasted me through one whole head (the last one) of papa's brief and simple discourse.

"In conclusion," said my father—"in conclusion," echoed my heart, "there's nothing but the cold mutton." At the end of his usual twenty minutes, my father released us, and having pronounced the benediction, remained standing in the pulpit, putting his spectacles in their case, and eyeing somewhat hostilely the wolf in sheep's clothing that had stolen into his fold. Poor, naughty, handsome wolf! One lamb longed to go and put out a friendly paw to him; but lambs do not always know what is good for them. And then the little congregation trickled out by the two doors, and the farmers' wives shook hands among themselves, and the old women in black poke bonnets by themselves, and John Barlow slouched over to

his mother's new tombstone, and read the inscription admiringly, having composed it himself; and then they all toddled decorously down the sunny road to the village. Behind them dawdled a disconsolate dragoon, casting, ever and anon, baffled and disconsolate looks behind him.

Meanwhile, I stood just within the church porch, tapping with my foot on the flags, above the buried head of another Eleanor Lestrange, chafing and fuming. It was my invariable custom to wait for my father, while he took off his gown, and usually, I had only about two seconds to wait. To-day the process of disrobing seemed a lengthier one. Perhaps it was only my angry imagination, but I could not help fancying that papa loitered purposely over his ungowning; purposely seduced old Iken into one of his long maunders.

"Toothless old nuisance!" said I, stamping on Eleanor Lestrange's head harder than ever. But stamping and malediction did not hasten the flow of old Iken's eloquence nor diminish my father's interest in it. At length it came to a sort of stop; and my father, cheerful and chatty, and I,

disappointed and choking, sauntered down the path, the figure of Richard, diminished by distance to the height of a few inches, was slowly disappearing round the corner.

"What brought that fine fellow here to-day, I wonder?" said my father affably, looking after him. I made no response, but gnawed the ivory top of my parasol in a silent mortification. There came no wolf to afternoon service at Lestrange church, and old Iken beginning another long rigmarole, was summarily repressed.

CHAPTER VIII.

About five o'clock on that Sunday, I was passing through the hall, dragging my feet after me in a languid and dispirited manner, like the devil

> "Trailing his nerveless tail,
> On the shore by the Red Sea sand,"

when my father called to me from the library—

"Nell! Nell! is that you?"

"Yes," said I, and ran in.

He was sitting in his old arm-chair among his books, and looked up as I made my appearance at the door.

"Oh! it *is* you, is it?" said he. "I want you to do something for me."

"Yes," said I, inquiringly.

"I promised to send old Widow Boyle some broth to-day, and I want to know whether you'll take it?"

"With the greatest pleasure," rejoined

I, briskly, glad of some occupation, and of an excuse for deserting "A Narrative of a Mission to the Jews," which entertaining work had been my Sunday reading for the last seven years. Whereupon I vanished from my parent's eyes.

Having obtained from Mrs. Smith a small tin can, filled with a greasy-looking and untempting liquid, supposed to be mutton broth, and having received with meekness her exhortations not to spill it over my Sunday gown, I set off. Up a steep field of beans, and down a steeper one of clover, across a little common tenanted by a very thin donkey, belonging to a tinker; then down a narrow lane, with high red sandstone banks and deep cartruts, and then I found myself at Widow Boyle's gate, with a mixed flavour of pigs and of that objectionable herb called southernwood, or old man, in my small nose. Having poured my broth into a bowl brought me for that purpose by Mr. Boyle's relict, and having received that gentlewoman's thanks, my tin can and I set off home again.

We went very slowly, I scrambling now

and again up the steep red banks after big primroses, shining in clusters in their starry paleness. I gathered a great bunch of them, ruthlessly tearing them from the homes where God had put them. Then I sat down on the grass by the roadside, and set to making an orderly nosegay of them. Two children came by presently with more primroses; then two sweethearts—the man sheepish, the girl giggling; and then, oh, then!—what in the world brought him there I never could make out—then a great big noble-looking young soldier, whose name was Richard M'Gregor. Apparently, he had not got over his huffiness, nor forgiven me; for he made as though he would have passed me, merely raising his hat; but I could not suffer that. Nature and impulse would have their way; this time I jumped up (and the primroses and the tin can jostled and hustled one another into a deep cartrut), ran across to him, and put out a most eager hand.

"Oh, please," said I, panting, "I hope you're not angry with me; I'm sorry I was so rude yesterday."

That man must have been colder than a statue who could resist two full soft lips begging with such pretty humility; and coldness of temperament was certainly not one of my sweetheart's vices or virtues.

The expression of huffy dignity melted out of his face—melted into the honestest, joyfullest smile.

"Who told you you were rude?" he asked. "I did not, I'm sure,"

"No, but you thought so, or you would not have gone away so suddenly."

"What could I do but go, when you sent me?"

I hung down my head.

"One does not always *quite* mean what one says," I said, slowly.

"Does not one? I'm glad to hear you say so; you *did* make me rather unhappy, I'll tell you that now; though, perhaps, you'll only use your knowledge to torment me a little more."

"I don't wish to torment anybody," I said, gently. "I've told you already I did not mean what I said; I was only joking; I meant to have told you so after

church this morning, only old Iken kept papa talking so long."

"I shall take the liberty of breaking old Mr. Iken's head for him next time I have the pleasure of meeting that old gentleman."

"He is rather tiresome," I said, "he's so deaf and stupid; but you believe what I said to you, don't you?" and I looked up earnestly at him.

"I don't know," he said, laughing; "I'll see about it. I'm of rather a sceptical nature; I never believe anything without proof."

"What proof can I give you?" I asked, eagerly.

He became grave.

"You can let me walk home with you?"

"Oh, certainly," replied I, with alacrity, "it's not five minutes walk from here to our gate."

His countenance fell a little.

"Not five minutes walk?" he repeated. "Well, anyhow, let us walk very slow, and make it ten minutes. Are those your flowers that are all tumbled about there? Let me pick them up for you."

I sat on the grass, and watched him as he did so, and gave him the biggest, sweetest primrose star I could find, as a reward, at his request. Then his eyes looked into mine, and spake softly to them, and his lips said:

"Don't go yet, please. As you are strong, be merciful."

I was merciful; I began to feel a person of some importance, and accorded him this favour also, very graciously. Nothing short of a miracle could bring papa here, I thought.

"Don't you find Sunday afternoon awfully long?" he asked, yawning. "I never have the least idea what to do with myself down here. Coxe is a rare good fellow, but he is not an over-lively companion; and Mrs. Coxe (sandy-haired Mrs. Coxe, d'you recollect?) is a little too fond of the peerage to suit my taste."

I was a little nettled.

"If you find us so dull in this part of the world, I wonder you do not leave us. I cannot imagine what keeps you?"

"Cannot you?" said he, a little coldly.

Then he went on in the same tone as before—

"Come, confess that you go to bed an hour earlier on Sundays than other days (everybody does), and that you are a little tired of reading sermons all day."

"I don't read sermons all day," I responded, gravely. "I read one to the servants, and sometimes, not very often, one to myself; but most of the afternoon I'm feeding the chickens, and seeing the cows milked, and that sort of thing."

"That does not sound very lively."

"One does not need to be very lively on Sundays," I answered, rather dogmatically.

"Does not one? I do not much know what one ought, and what one ought not to do; I wish you'd teach me."

"Teach you what?"

"Oh, I don't know; it does not matter what—anything. I should like to be taught by you."

I looked down, and plucked nervously at my flowers. Is this the way young men always talk to girls, I wondered?

"You would not be a very hard school-

mistress, would you?" pursued he, leaning his head on his hand, with his hat tilted over his eyes.

I laughed a little.

"It's a good idea my teaching anybody anything. I'm the greatest dunce in Europe."

"You are a very pretty dunce," said he, slowly and emphatically. The colour rushed into my cheeks. It could not be right to allow him to say such things to me—such pleasant, untrue things, especially. I flashed an indignant look at him, and gathered up my flowers, preparatory to going.

"You ought not to say such things to me," said I, vehemently, "it's not right. I'm not pretty, and you know I'm not; and you're either laughing at me, or you think I'm a poor countrified simpleton, who will believe anything you like to tell her."

He flushed a little too, and half rose from his reclining posture.

"I wish to Heaven there were more such countrified simpletons," said he, speaking with as much vehemence as I

had done. "You always *will* misunderstand me,—always *will* think that I mean to insult you. It may be impertinent of me—I know it is, but I cannot help it. I forget my manners when I am with you. You *are* pretty—awfully pretty, and I cannot, for the life of me, help telling you so. There! be as angry with me now as you please."

He was excited, and reddened through all his sunburntness, as he uttered this last clause resignedly, awaiting a fresh burst of wrath from me. But no such burst came. I stood dumbfoundered. Here, then, was one of those eccentric individuals mentioned ironically by Dolly. Here was some one in whose eyes red hair and a wide mouth were recommendations. There was an awkward pause.

"Well," said he, softly, at last, rather embarrassed, "are you very angry? Have I sinned quite past forgiveness?"

"Oh, I don't know, I'm sure," I said, in confusion, turning away my burning face, "I—I—don't suppose you have *sinned*, as you call it, at all—only you startled me a little. I'm not used to

having those—those sort of things said to me, and—and I think I'll go home now."

I rose as I spoke, and armed myself with my can.

"No, *please* don't," said he, very eagerly. "I'll promise not to be rude again. I'll bite my tongue out first. Only *do* stop fine minutes longer. I've got so many things to say to you."

"You must say them some other time," said I, hurriedly.

"Ay, that's the rub!" he answered, standing before me, with an anxious look in his gray eyes. "What other time? Am I always to have to trust to chance? May I never come to see you in your own home?"

I looked down, and kicked a little pebble about.

"Why do you ask me?" I said. "How can I tell?"

"Who can I ask then?—your father? You know how pleased he was to see me the other night. He was longing to turn me out of the garden; I saw it in his face. Can you deny it?"

I hesitated, and swung my tin can backwards and forwards.

"I don't deny it," I said at last, slowly, "that is to say—I don't mean about the turning you out; but I think he thought that you—that I—ought not to have stayed there in the garden without him. I don't know why he was displeased, I'm sure. I don't think we did much harm."

I looked up innocently at him, to gather his opinion on the subject of our common iniquity, and I really believe that I was not aware that my big blue eyes looked rather well with that air of childish inquiry in them. Richard *was* aware of that fact; looking back now, with the advantage of increased experience of that queer biped, man, I think he was.

"Harm!" said he, warmly. "I should think not indeed. He would be a pretty brute that could do you any harm. There! if I'm not offending again—breaking my promise, and making pretty speeches. By Jove! I cannot help it."

I dissected a primrose carefully.

"Papa is so very, *very* seldom angry with me—hardly ever, but he really *was*

displeased that night. He said it must never occur again."

Richard stroked his tawny moustache meditatively.

"I'm not sure that he was not right. I have no doubt he thought I was taking a great liberty—which I was—and trying to get up an underhand—ahem!—ahem! —acquaintance with you, which I was not. I never like doing things underhand. I should like to come and call on him to-morrow, only I don't well see how I could. Tell me, did he call me any very hard names behind my back that unlucky evening?"

The ragged brown hat was unable to conceal the scarlet hue that my youthful and ingenuous countenance assumed at this awkward query. My blushes during this interview succeeded each other so rapidly that they almost made one continuous blush.

Face and figure, the cut of his clothes, and the tone of his voice, all were so very *un-Brummagem*, that I could not induce my lips to frame the obnoxious epithet that my sire had applied to him.

"Never mind," said he, laughing carelessly. "I see he did. Well, perhaps he'll think a little better of me some day. We must live in hopes."

"I think," said I, shyly, "I'm sure he'd like you if he were to know you better."

"I'm glad you think I improve upon acquaintance; perhaps *you* did not think much of me then, when we meditated together, yet severally, among the tombs in that pretty churchyard of yours?"

I responded not, but took out my watch to see how the time went. I was always ashamed of having no watch but that ancient warming-pan I have before described, and now endeavoured to shade it as much as possible from Richard's critical eyes with my long, slight fingers. My companion caught sight of a broad, yellow face between my shielding digits.

"What a handsome old watch!" said he, quite respectfully, to it. "An antique, isn't it?"

"I know it's antique," quoth I, pouting, and scenting ridicule where ridicule was not. "A great deal too antique to please me; so antique, that all its inside is worn

out, and I have to set it every two hours, but I cannot help it. I have not got any better, so I must wear it, and I wish you would not laugh at it."

So I, rapid and injured, disregarding pnnctuation: to me, Richard:

"If I was laughing, it was a convulsive grin—a contortion of the facial muscles. May I look at it? Thanks. Yes, it is an antique, and rather valuable one, I fancy. This sort of chasing is very rare now-a-days. A connoisseur would give you a pot of money for it."

"Would he? you don't mean *really?*" said I, greedily.

"I do indeed; the way I know anything about it is that *the mum*—my mother, I mean—is as mad as two hatters, poor old lady, on the subject of articles of *vertù*, as she calls them, and I hear so much jargon about them at home, from her and the girls, that I have picked up one or two scraps of information, whether I would or no; my mother would go wild over this turnip, though it *is* an uncommon ugly one."

Hope with her anchor, and a fat man

with a cleaver, danced a jig before my mind's eye.

"Do you think—have you any idea—would your mother *buy* it, do you think?" I stopped, quivering at my own audacity.

"You don't mean to say you want to sell an old heirloom like that? why I'm sure it must have belonged to your people for centuries."

"I don't know about that," said I, with great *sang froid*, "and I don't care much either. It belonged to a grandmother of mine, whom I never saw, and whom I daresay I should not have liked if I had seen her; I hate old women generally."

"I'm fast getting new lights on your character," said Dick, "what a mercenary person you must be! Are you sure that you have not got some Hebrew blood in your veins?"

"Oh no, *indeed* I'm not mercenary," I cried, sorely distressed. "Please don't say that, and I do assure you we never had anything to say to the Jews, but I do want some money *very, very* badly just now."

A mist of tears came before my eyes

as I thought of my old daddy, worried into his grave before his time, by sordid cares.

If ever astonishment depicted itself on a human countenance, it did then on the pleasing exterior of that much amazed dragoon. Then an inkling of the truth dawned upon him; perhaps he called to mind some of the many rumours he must have heard of our poverty, which was indeed not unknown to fame. For a minute compassion, sincere, surprised compassion, clouded his glad young eyes.

"If you do really want to get rid of it," said he, kindly affecting to ignore my tearful eagerness; "I can easily take it up to town with me next time I go. There are lots of shops where I could dispose of it for you with the greatest ease, if you'd only give me time; there's no great hurry about it, I suppose?"

"Oh, but indeed there is," said I, clinging to this new hope like a drowning man to a straw; "if I don't get the money to-morrow, it will do me no good. I—I—want it for a particular purpose—to—to buy something for myself." This I said

in my astuteness, to put him off the scent of the butcher.

"*To-morrow!*" said he, opening his gray eyes very wide, "that is a short allowance of time; why, in the first place, I should have to go up to town about it."

"Would you? Oh, but indeed I could not think of putting you to so much expense and trouble for me," I said compunctiously.

"Trouble, a fiddlestick! I shall be glad of an excuse to air my brains a bit; I think some of the fluff and flue of Coxe's cotton mills is getting into them: but *by to-morrow!*"

"Tuesday morning would do: Tuesday morning early; but indeed I'm asha——"

"Will you be so kind as to be silent? silence is woman's best ornament; do you know that? and I see that you are going to say something foolish. Well, I'll make no rash promises, but I'll do my best, and glad of the job!"

"You're—you're very good to me, and I'm sure I cannot imagine why," said I, and up went my blue eyes in a reverent rapture to his face.

"I *am* good, a very good boy indeed. I wonder you never found that out before, but if I do succeed, as I hope I shall, how am I to let you know that I have?".

"Ah, to be sure!"

"Would you mind meeting me here, or somewhere else to-morrow evening? I'm sorry to trouble you, but I don't see how else it's to be done."

"I'd rather not," said I, in a mumbling manner.

"Why?"

Many pebbles kicked about, the lid of the can removed and replaced three several times. "If I were to ask papa's leave, he'd say no, and if I did not, it would be sly underhand!"

"Probity personified! Must I then come to Lestrange, and run the risk of being turned out again by an enraged parent? I'm 'exceedingly brave, particular;' but I really don't think I'm brave enough for that."

I smiled a little and shook my head.

"Must I go to the backdoor then, and bribe one of the 'young men or maidens' to take a message to you?"

"No, *certainly not*," with emphasis.

"What must I do then? I'm amenable to orders." No suggestions for a while, then I, with diffidence—

"Could not you—would you mind sending the money, if you have any, in an envelope, by post, I mean?"

"I *could*, certainly, but as you said just now, I'd rather not."

"I thought you said you were amenable to orders," said I, with an attempt to be smart, which sat, I felt, rather ill on me.

"So I am to most orders, but not to this one; the exception, you know, proves the rule; come let us split the difference; I won't ask you to leave your own grounds, just come and meet me at the bottom of your garden, where that hedge of lilac bushes is, you know. I won't detain you a minute, I promise, and upon my soul, *I don't bite*; say yes, *do*; y—e—s, yes; you cannot conceive how easy it is to pronounce."

"Yes."

"Well, you *are* laconic, but it's very good of you, all the same, and I'll never tease you again, hanged if I will! On Wed-

nesday, I'm coming openly in the eye of day, to pay my respects under Mrs. Coxe's wing. I daren't come without Mrs. Coxe, and as it is, I shall feel something like a naughty little boy come to beg pardon."

As he spoke I had been detaching my watch from the chain, and now gave it into his hands.

"I *will* go now," I said. "Don't keep me a minute longer, or perhaps pa may be after me."

"Not a minute—but stay, don't forget to be in the garden, somewhere about nine to-morrow. No great hardship surely, these spring evenings. Star-gazing is——"

"Good-by," said I, cutting short the thread of his eloquence, and holding out my hand.

"Good-by," said he, squeezing it till all my fingers seemed crushed into one painful mass. But I bore it like a man; not a groan revealed my agony.

"Then, like a blast away I passed,
And no man saw me more."

CHAPTER IX.

Is it possible that one is through the whole course of one's life the same individual being? Is one possessed of but one individual soul? Does it not rather seem that each man or woman is in himself or herself a succession of individual beings, possessing, one after another, several successive souls? Our body is the same body at fifty as it was at five, and as it will be at seventy—the same, subject only to the changes and modifications made by time, weather, sickness, or mode of life. Wonderful as it seems, the fat, pink, dimpling baby body is the same as the withered old yellow carcase tottering into the long-expecting tomb; but our soul—is it the same? I trow not. Our estimate of things and people, our habits, tastes, dispositions, at certain periods of our life are so radically different from, and totally antagonistic to,

what they are at other such periods, that I think it is hardly possible that their variations should be accounted for by any of the alterations that it is within the province of time, sorrow, or any change of inner or outer life to effect.

Perhaps, at certain epochs in our history, separated by varying periods of time, a new soul (in our sleep, may be) passes into our body, each successive soul sadder than the last. A more nonsensical, puerile idea never entered a human head, I'm aware; but here it is, and I cannot cast it out. *Can* I, *can* I be the same individual soul, the same *ego* as that girl who stood one May morning on a ladder, nailing monthly roses up against the hall windows at dear old Lestrange? There I stood, in a faded green muslin, with a hammer in one hand and a nail in the other, humming softly to myself as I hammered. A party of young starlings stared at me from their residence under the eaves, and opened their great yellow mouths wide, expecting me to pop worms into them, as their mamma was in the habit of doing.

"The summer hath its heavy cloud;
The rose leaf must fall,"

I sang under my breath to myself. "Rose leaf must fall," indeed. I wish it did not, for they make a sad litter on the border; I must make some *pot pourri* of them. I suppose the roses in Eden never fell or withered. What an odd idea? I wonder how that was managed. Were there always fresh roses coming out, and the old ones flowering on eternally? How the bushes must have overblown themselves.

"But in our land joy wears no shroud,
Never doth it pall.
Ne—ever do—oth it pa—all."

A strong wind had been blowing all night, that had loosened half the rose boughs; but now all was still—still and calm as the sleep of the just. Far off I heard the dull drowsing burr of a threshing machine at work, and the bow-wow-ow of a little dog that felt himself insulted, coming from a distant farm; nearer, our gardening man, mowing the dewy lawn, and beheading a thousand daisies; nearer still, two wood-pigeons in our wood, telling

their sweet prosy love tale to one another interminably—cooroo, cooroo, cooroo, cooroo; nearest of all, the important busy humming of a big bumble bee, going in and out of the campanula bells, stealing her honey drops from each.

I look back on that May morning, and on myself at my pretty play-work, as Eve must have looked back upon the pastimes of Paradise. I am not separated from that time by any great crime, as she was from the period of her happiness; but I think the yearning regret that filled the universal mother's bosom for the lotos-scented airs that breathed about the banks of those mystic eastern rivers, was akin to the eager longing (never to be gratified now) with which I inhale in fancy the rough western breezes blowing round old Lestrange.

I suppose it rained there in those days; I suppose it snowed and was foggy, and cold, and dreary there in those days as much as other places—perhaps more; but I cannot realize that now; to me it seems as if those gnarled old trees were always crowned with a glory of green

leaves; as if those walls were always sunlit; as if the pinks and the sweet peas and the larkspurs flowered there all the year round. I did not think myself particularly happy in those days. That is the worst of this life—one never tastes its sweets while they are in one's mouth; it is only when they are gone, and we are chewing the bitters, and making wry faces over them, that we recognise them for what they were.

I took it as a matter of course that I was young and healthy and cheerful; to be so was the normal state of humanity, I thought. Sickness and sadness were abnormal, exceptional; why should I trouble my head about them? I had my annoyances, too; wore threadbare clothes and was gawky; and sometimes went to sleep with tears on my eyelashes — tears caused by my old daddy's stooping head and thin gray hair.

It was market day, and along the broad highway that skirted our grounds rolled gigs and tax-carts by dozens. I was continually turning my head to admire the smart bonnets of the farmers' wives, which distracted my attention sadly from my work.

Occasionally a horseman varied the programme—a farmer's boy taking a rough cart colt to water, the parson jogging along on his old roan pony, which in superannuated fatness yielded the palm to none save papa's; then a county neighbour, lazy and plethoric, ambling by to justice meeting. Presently came a sharper, brisker sound—a long swinging trot. Round veered my head again, and simultaneously the sound ceased, and I perceived that the horseman had stopped at our gate, and was struggling to open it with his whip-handle, a measure which his steed did his best to prevent.

The steed had the best of it, too, at first, and would have had to this hour, if he had not good-naturedly given in. "Who can it be?" said I to myself. "Benbow's clerk, I suppose." Now, Benbow was my father's attorney, and his clerk was the chiefest among my bugbears, coming not infrequently on mysterious errands that cast a gloom over the establishment. I stood poised in air on the topmost rung of the ladder, and watched with interest. Under the elms came man and horse, the leaf shadows waving a shifting, dancing

pattern over them till they reached the lower gate, not a hundred yards from where I was. Recognition here was certain, that is to say, if the man happened to be known to me. He was so known; but if he had been the "Mickle De'il" himself I could not have fled with more precipitancy at his aspect. I sprang from the ladder, ran into the house, through the cool drowsy hall, where the double-chinned, powdered Miss Lestranges, and the fat-faced, wigged Master Lestranges were smirking at nothing but the walls as usual, headlong into the sanctum where Mrs. Smith sat, muddling her old head over rows of illegible figures, doing those eternal accounts that never would come right.

"Mrs. Smith — Mrs. Smith!" cried I panting and aghast, "Sir Hugh Lancaster is coming down the drive, *now*, this minute, and I *know* he's coming to luncheon."

Despair on a thin young face is pathetic; on a fat, elderly one ludicrous. I laughed, but my mirth soon sank into a wail.

"Pa's so hospitable, he's certain to ask him. I never can get him to remember

that there *never* is anything for luncheon."

My companion resented this insult to our commissariat.

"*Now, Miss Lestrange! Nothing?* Why, there's always the mutton, and it was only yesterday—no, the day before—that I sent you in a lovely dish of fry."

"Is there any fry to-day?" My heart leaped at the thought.

"My dear, how could there be, when you ate it all o' Saturday? and that plaguy ould butcher has not been near the place since; and for my part, the less he comes the better I'm pleased."

"I shall give the butcher," said I, superbly waving my arm, "a lesson he'll not forget in a hurry."

"I'm sure I wish you could 'm," said my companion, a little incredulously; "but had not we better be *schaming* something for luncheon?"

"Scheming the tops of our heads off will not put any meat in the larder; are there any fowls?"

"Ye—es; there's four or five of them ould Cochy hens: but they're walking

about upon the yard, and it's after twelve now."

"Heavens!"

"There's the mutton," quoth she, recurring to that accursed joint.

"The mutton, Mrs. Smith!" said I, reproachfully. "I wonder at you; that mutton has come in every day for the last fortnight to my certain knowledge, and it's literally and actually nothing but bone."

"There's eggs and bacon."

"Eggs and bacon! Merciful powers, is it come to this? My good woman, do reflect a minute, and you'll see the absurdity of your proposition. Think of inviting Sir Hugh Lancaster to eggs and bacon! I'd as soon ask him to take a slice of dirt pie with me."

"Well, my dear, as good as 'im 'as made their dinners off 'em afore now, and been thankful. Who is them Lancasters, after all, I wonder? Cock 'em up! Not 'alf as good gentry as your pa, as eats whatever's set before him, and makes no fuss about it neither."

I stared glassily at her, and then at the ceiling, and then at the flies on the window,

but nowhere did I see roast joints or succulent *entrées.* What was the use of letting one's fancy run riot among impossible dainties? Out of nothing, nothing can come. I rose in despair from the cane-bottomed chair on which I had precipitated myself, and emphasizing each clause of my sentence with my hammer, I said, solemnly—

"Eggs and bacon it must be then; but I wash my hands of them and of you. I won't witness our disgrace; I'll go to bed sooner than appear at luncheon. If I'm asked for, tell Collins to say that I'm ill; I *shall* be ill; it's enough to make any one ill."

Hereupon I went and stole on *patte de velours* past the library, where I heard Sir Hugh's jolly voice holding forth, and my father's (hardly less jolly for the time) responding. I betook myself to my little upper chamber, looking westwards, whence I had so often watched the great sun go down, sat down on the edge of my bed, forgot my troubles, and built air-castles. Of these edifices Richard was châtelain and I châtelaine; in them papa had the

best suite of rooms, and from them Dolly was utterly cast out.

The hall clock struck one very gravely, as it always did. I slid from my bed to the floor, embraced my knees with my arms, and re-commenced building. The clock struck half-past. Five minutes more, and then the door opened, and Mrs. Smith entered with a plate of thick bread and butter.

"I thought you'd be famished up here all by yourself, my dear," said she; "but indeed I don't see why you should not go down: I don't indeed."

"Quite out of the question, madam," replied I, rather indistinctly, with my mouth full of bread and butter; "by-the-by, is luncheon in?"

"I just sent it in before I came up, and a very nice luncheon too; a piece of cold roast mutton, and a beautiful dish of mashed potatoes, and plenty of eggs and bacon."

"Plenty!" ejaculated I faintly, thinking of the small and elegant dishes I had seen at the Coxian feast, "about how many?"

"Well, 'm, I thought as there was not

to say much on the mutton, and as the hens is layin' pretty tidy just at present, I thought I'd better make it 'alf a dozen!"

At this juncture, another knock came at the door, and Mary, the housemaid, introduced herself.

"Please, miss, master begs as you'll go down *direcly*."

"What!" cried I in a fury; "did not I tell Collins to say I was ill, if I was asked for?"

"Yes, miss, and so he did, but your pa said he did not believe as 'ow you was very bad, and he desired his love, and he begged you'd come down just to obleege him, if only for five minutes; I think I understood as the gentleman was asking for you."

I laid down my bread and butter, and groaned. Mrs. Smith, with great presence of mind, seized a brush, and tried to plaster down my hair at each side of my face, and Mary gave two or three severe tugs to my dress, in the well-meant endeavour to lengthen it, and then I went. The gentlemen were already in the dining-room, and I felt overpowered

with shyness as I opened the door and entered. As I took my seat at the head of the table, I gave one comprehensive glance at the arrangements. Our table was a very big, wide one, and the leg of mutton, which had never been a large one, was now "beautifully less." It showed like a dim speck on the vast ocean of table-cloth. I could not make the same complaint of the eggs and bacon; they filled the eye and overpowered it; they seemed to me to be like the sand that is by the sea-shore in number.

"I hope your head is better, Miss Lestrange," said Sir Hugh, politely; he had wisely eschewed the mutton, and was eating a fat rasher with apparent relish.

"My head?" said I, raising a pair of bewildered blue eyes from my plate.

"Yes, to be sure, *your head*," put in my father, a little impatiently. "Collins told us you had a headache, and Sir Hugh is kindly asking after it; can't you understand?"

"Oh yes, I remember—oh, thanks—oh yes, it is quite well; pretty well, I mean, much better, thanks!" So I, incoherent

and scarlet. Sir Hugh left me in peace after that, for which I called him blessed; left me at leisure to admire the simple hearty hospitality with which papa offered our meagre viands to our guest. He made no flimsy apologies for the poverty of the entertainment; he did not try to affect that the fare was worse than it usually was; he was vexed indeed, as I, who knew every line of his countenance, discovered at once, but I would have defied any stranger to detect it.

Sir Hugh was a short man, but otherwise not ill-looking. He had a jolly countenance, not encumbered with any particular expression, a jolly laugh at anybody's service; enough brains to carry him decently through his very easy part in life, and not enough to make him feel uncomfortably wise in any company. Nobody had ever heard him say a clever thing, or a spiteful one. Mothers chased him, and he eluded their pursuit with so much good humour that they liked him all the better; daughters smiled at him, and he smiled back at them, but he smiled universally, which was discouraging; nobody ever accused

him of having ever had his affections blighted, and yet now his dark hair was grizzling fast, and his big red house was mistressless still.

He did not love anybody in the world much, not even himself, and he liked everybody. Misfortune left him alone, because I really believe she could not find a vulnerable spot in him. Presently he spoke to me again. I think he had been casting about in his mind for a remark to make for some minutes before the remark arrived, but was not quite sure on what subject I could talk—was a little doubtful whether I could talk on any subject.

"So your sister's coming home, I hear?"

"Yes."

"Jolly for you having her back?"

"Ye—es."

"So dull being by oneself, isn't it?"

My courage was rising, the string of my tongue was loosed.

"No, I don't think so; I like being alone; one's thoughts are always pleasant company; pleasanter far than most of one's friends."

"Ha, ha! you mean that for a hit at me,

I'm afraid; but really now I never can make out what women can have to think about, except their crotchet-work; what are your pleasant thoughts about, I wonder?"

I resented this catechism suited to the intellect of a five years' child.

"Nothing worth mentioning," I said, tartly, "neither fat cattle nor guano!"

He looked puzzled for a minute.

"Well, I suppose not. What made you pitch upon two such unlikely subjects? Oh I see! You think they are about the only subjects I am fit to talk about; ah, very good, very good!"

My father rose, looking rather vexed.

"Don't get into the habit of making rude speeches, Nell, I advise you; a sharp woman is the most odious animal in creation; come, Sir Hugh, shall we take a turn about the place?"

Sir Hugh looked as if he would have liked to have said something good-natured to me, but could not make up his mind what, and contented himself with smiling encouragingly, and then followed my father, leaving me to feel as small as ever snubbed young woman need do.

CHAPTER X.

At eight that evening, the blue summer sky hid itself behind low hanging gray clouds; at a quarter past eight, a small fine rain was pouring steadily down, settling itself to a good night's work; at half-past eight, I twisted a great coil of my red hair round my head, and slipped two wooden bead bracelets, given me by Dolly in a paroxysm of generosity, one birthday, over my wrists; these were all the preparations for meeting my love which my resources allowed of. At five minutes past nine, I ran down into the hall, took an old shawl from the cloak-stand, and was searching for an umbrella, when I heard my father's slow step crossing the library floor. Instantly I disappeared. I put the shawl over my head, and ran down the gravel walk, over the shining pebbles, to the trysting-place.

There was an ornamental wooden gate in the lilac hedge; a gate separating our Eden from the profane outer world of the hay meadow. I peeped over this gate, and all about the lilac bushes; not a soul was there; my heart sank; "He cometh not," said I, quoting Marianna. I gazed disconsolately through the rain for exactly three minutes, at the end of which time, I spied an object looming dimly through the misty air; it might have been a horse or a cow, a house or a haystack. It was none of these; it resolved itself into a large laughing young man, in damp velveteen.

"Before your time," said he, gaily, as he came up, "see what it is to have sold your watch; it's five minutes to nine still." I gave him no greeting; I only looked up at him with dumb anxiety. "What, not a word for me! I don't think I shall tell you at all, if you look so eager; it would not be good for you! Well, is the lion to come in to the lamb, or the lamb to come out to the lion?"

"Oh, the lamb—oh, I—I mean—I'll come out to you." I unlatched the gate,

and passed out into the long wet meadow grass, which felt much like stepping into a tepid foot-bath. "Well," said I, breathlessly, clasping my hands as if he was my God, and I was praying to him.

"Well, Miss Lestrange, what?"

"Oh, you know what I mean, have you any news for me?"

"News! oh yes, lots; the funds have fallen to 84; and the Bishop of —— is dead; and the eldest Miss Coxe is going to be married—to me—at least, so I heard this morning."

"If you asked me out here, only to make game of me, I may as well go home," I said; my not angelic temper succumbing under this process of aggravation.

"*I* ask you to come out this damp evening, and run the risk of catching a bad cold? *I* make game of you? God forbid!"

I turned away in mute indignation.

"What, you really are going? Well, I'm sorry for that. It's so jolly standing chatting here in this puddle; but it *is* rather a wet evening, isn't it? seasonable though, for the time of year."

I fumbled at the fastening of the gate, blind with rage. "Your wit, sir," said I, my voice trembling with passion, and drawing myself up with as much dignity as my limp old gown would admit of, "may be appreciated by Mr., Mrs., and *Miss* Coxe, but it won't go down at Lestrange. I wish you good evening."

"Good evening, Miss Lestrange," said he, opening the gate for me to pass through, and baring his handsome head to the rain. "By-the-by, would you be so kind as to take charge of a small parcel which I believe belongs to you?"

He pulled a small roll of bank-notes from his pocket, as he spoke, and gave them to me. I hesitated. Should I throw them back with scorn into his teasing face, or should I gratify my intense curiosity to know how many there were of them? Curiosity prevailed, as I fancy it always has done, where women have been concerned, since the day when Eve was roused to inquisitiveness concerning that fruit which must have been a great deal more inviting to eye, and smell, and touch, than any apple that ever ripened, or she

would not have run such tremendous risks for the sake of it. It was no Ribstone pippin, I feel assured, that served humanity that dirty turn, rather some juicy perfumed eastern pulp.

I unrolled the notes, with fingers rendered awkward by greedy haste, separated and smoothed out each one; pleasant were their crisp watered faces unto me. Will there be £10, £20; either sum would be a nice little sop for Cerberus. So I thought, and then I counted one, two, three, four, five. Five times ten are fifty. FIFTY POUNDS for that most despicable of old turnips, whose interior was, so to speak, a dead letter; one of whose hands was a mutilated stump, whose movements were so erratic that no man could calculate from hour to hour what its next freak would be, and which was unwieldy, unbeautiful, and everything that was undesirable. Now and then, in these latter days, a strong qualm of doubt shoots through me, that never did that old warming-pan see the inside of Wardour Street, that that £50 came out of the not too well-lined pockets of poor open-hearted Dick M'Gregor. No

such doubts had I at that time, to trouble my blissful young serenity; in those days I believed everything I heard, everything I was told, and almost everything I read. For a minute I stood, with drooped head, remorse driving small penknives through and through my heart; then I put out both hands, and said "O—h!" under my breath.

"Well, Miss Lestrange, what have I done wrong now? Anything fresh? I'm not witty now, surely, am I?"

"Oh, don't, don't," I cry, whimperingly, and I cover my face with my left hand, and grope for my pocket-handkerchief with my right, while the shawl takes the opportunity of slipping off my head, down into an improvised pool among the buttercups; and there I stand, thin-clad, bare-headed, in the steadily pouring rain.

He picks up the shawl, and shakes it.

"Are you too hot, Miss Lestrange? as you appear to be casting away your garments wholesale; if I might give an opinion, I should say that this was neither the time nor the place for taking a vapour bath."

I take away my shielding hand from my face, which I lift shy and burning towards his.

"Oh, please, don't mock at me any more. I *cannot* bear it; I thought you were only turning me into ridicule, and I—I—haven't a very good temper, I'm afraid, and I—I—oh! if you only knew how I felt, I'm sure you'd leave me alone."

Whereupon I fell to weeping sore, for no particular cause. Oh, my Dick, my bonny, bonny sweetheart! how goodly you were then! are you goodlier now, I wonder, in that distant *Somewhere* where you are; or when we meet next, shall we be two bodiless spirits, sexless, passionless essences, passing each other without recognition in the fields of ether? God forbid that it should be so! oh, my King Olaf, as I called you first, in my girlish romance, and I cleave to the old name still. Oh, strong fair Norseman! did you rise from your warrior grave under the icy Northern waves, and come back among men only to shame the punyness of your descendants; and have you gone back thither again to your sleep beneath the green billows?

there comes no voice out of the void to answer me.

* * * *

. Tears played the good speed with Richard. In justice to myself, I must distinctly state that I was not aware of this fact, but was, on the contrary, grievously displeased with myself for having been beguiled into weeping. Had his grandmother, his maiden aunt, his laundress, or any old beggarwoman in the street cried at him, he would have been seriously disturbed at it. How much more then when a really good-looking young woman was making her nose and eyes of a flame colour in her anguish at his cruelty. The smile died out of his jocund young face as if it had been an exorcised demon; nothing could be more surprisedly, pitifully penitent, than the expression of his blue-gray eyes; he looked like a big dog that is very much ashamed of himself for having been betrayed into bullying a little one. For a minute he was quite at a loss what to do; then he bethought himself of my shawl, which he wrapped round my shoulders, saying hurriedly, meanwhile:

"There! there! don't cry, don't cry! poor little girl! it was a shame to make her pretty blue eyes red, wasn't it? but I didn't mean to vex her, indeed I didn't. I'd cut off my right hand before I'd hurt a hair of her sweet head."

He had bandaged me up so tight in his eagerness, that I could hardly stir; I laughed through my tears.

"You've tied me up so tight that I cannot move my arms; I'm like a mummy."

He laughed too. "So I have, poor dear Nell! what an ill-used little girl she is!"

He bent over me to re-arrange my shawl, but when he had disposed its shabby old folds to his mind, he kept his arms about me. The rain dripped from his hat, and from his curly yellow hair, and Heaven's tears washed his bronzed cheeks; I looked up at him with shy rapture; at that brow "that looked like marble, and smelt like myrrh," at the honest, kindly, beautiful face; looked into his passionate eyes, and forgot the rain, and the long tangled grass, and my own mortifying silly behaviour, forgot everything in my new-found wonderful bliss.

"Am I teasing you now? shall I leave you alone, as you asked me just now? Must I? I will if you wish me; I should dislike extremely having to do it, but I will in a minute, if you tell me."

So he whispers, while his gold locks and my russet ones blend agreeably together. I had not the slightest desire that he should leave me alone, but I said neither yea nor nay.

"Poor little pussy-cat, is she very anxious to get away? does not she like being kept a prisoner? won't she stay with me one little minute? she'd have to go far before she could find anyone that would love her better!"

For all answer, I lay my head on his breast, which the inclement weather has rendered rather a moist resting-place, and my cheeks put on their rouge, which the May showers vainly endeavour to wash off. He kisses me softly, and I forget to be scandalized.

"Do you know, Nell, I do really like you rather, joking apart."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, I do; it's rather nice, don't you

know? having a foolish sort of little girl to kiss and make love to, and tease now and then; I haven't near done teasing you yet, miss, if you think that."

I raise my head, and make a feint of going. "If that's the way you're going to treat me, I'd better leave you this minute."

"Do by all means, *if you can*; by Jove! how blue your eyes are, quite China blue, like tea cups!"

"What a pretty comparison!"

"I didn't say they were pretty; they're very big and babyish, and they pretend to be very innocent looking; but *pretty!* not exactly."

"I won't stay another minute."

"You're not going for two hours yet, good; and not then without paying toll; twenty kisses, and as many more as I'm good enough to accept."

I make no relevant answer to this shocking announcement. I only burrow my countenance into his drenched velveteen shoulder, and murmur to it "O—h."

"Are you pretty comfortable, Miss Lestrange?"

"Yes."

"Nice growing weather, as I said just now, when you were in such an awful rage with me."

"Oh don't, *don't* remind me of it!'

"Yes, indeed, Miss Nell, you may well hide your face; that temper, unless checked in time, *may* (mind I don't say that it *will*, because our laws are so lenient, now-a-days), *may* bring you to the gallows."

"What! for murdering you?"

"Yes, for tearing my fine eyes out, or biting my nose off, or some such atrocity; oh, you darling; how have I managed to get on all these eight and twenty years without you?"

The warm rain pattered and plashed on our faces; the big white lilac bush bent above us its dripping leaves, and fair large flower-clusters brushed our cheeks, and gave out its strong pure scent freely to us.

"Heaven is crying pretty freely over our courtship, Nell," Dick says presently. "I hope it's not ominous."

"Hush! speak lower! I hear the gravel crunching!"

"Nonsense!"

"But I do, indeed. Sh! sh! sh!"

We listen; there is undeniably a faint noise, as of gravel ground beneath a yet distant heel.

"It's papa; he very often comes out after tea; but I thought the wet would keep him in to-night. If I run very fast, I shall be out of sight before he gets round here; he has not got to the garden-house yet!"

"Da——, I mean hang him; why could not he stay indoors till we come to fetch him?"

I laughed. "Good-night; let me go, quick!"

"Not unless you say 'good-night, darling.' I'll keep you else, till the governor comes round here, and then begin to talk very loud; by Jove! would not the old gentleman look alive? well, is it coming? 'good-night, darling,' or such a blowing up from Sir Adrian."

I made the required concession with less bashfulness than might have been expected of me, and then took to my heels, and reached my room, panting, dishevelled, crimson, but in safety.

CHAPTER XI.

ANATHEMA MARANATHA be upon him, whether he be black or white, young or old, gentle or simple, philosopher or dunce, bond or free, who says we are not intended to be happy in this world! Can our God be of so refined a cruelty as to have created so many millions of human beings, just to worry their lives out? Can He have framed them into such an ingenious compound of matter and spirit? —can He have given them such vast capabilities of being glad and being sorry, merely that He may the better torment them? Can He have made us out of spite, as Caliban opines of his god Setebos, in Browning's fine poem? If He had done so, why did He make the period of our sufferings so short? why did He not make us eternal? then indeed (were He such a monster of *barbarity*, as is pre-supposed by this hypothesis), might He have worthily

wreaked his hatred upon us. Our religion, as Pascal remarks, is the only one that inculcates on its votaries not only awe and reverence, but love towards the Deity.

Could it reasonably ask us to give our hearts to a capricious, malignant demon, who had put us together, only that He might mangle us? Moreover, would not such a demon in all probability have got tired of his cruel game, having had so many hundred generations on which to practice it? Would not he probably be turning his devilish power of inflicting anguish into some new channel; testing it upon some other family of defenceless sufferers? To no demon's malice do we owe our creation; our God meant us to be boundlessly, flawlessly happy; *that* we never can be now, thanks to ourselves; but moderately, temperately, soberly happy we may still be, if we go the right way to work. Happy, partly in present fruition, far more in expectancy; happiest in the very fact which at the first blush has a sorry aspect—that all our happinesses here are but transitory, mere types and shadows

of worthier substances, never to be grasped till this mortal has put on immortality!

Perfectly contented we never can be here. Kick as we may against the fiat which forbids it; struggle and strain as we may to attain that unattainable good; it is an impossibility, from the very constitution of our souls, which are ever unconsciously, involuntarily, looking onwards, onwards, from year to year, from hour to hour, from minute to minute.

"I shall be satisfied, but oh, not here!"

Fully satisfied on this earth can our spirits never be; they being of so high a nature; cast in so noble a mould that nothing less than God can fill them. Somebody, I forget who, remarks, on the rarity of hearing any one exclaim, "How happy I *am*!" "How happy I *was*!" and "How happy I shall be!" are frequent ejaculations, but to hear man, born of woman, felicitate himself on his present condition, is uncommon indeed. So it must ever be till the restless hungry soul be laid asleep in light.

My happiness that night was not tem-

perate, moderate, sober; it was limitless, frenzied, drunken. The pace was too good to last, as I might have known, had I not been nineteen, and somewhat of a greenhorn, even for that immature age. I wonder I did not catch my death of cold, I'm sure. It never occurred to me, either to go to bed or take off my wet clothes. Hour after hour, I sat with drenched garments clinging close round me, with my dank thick hair streaming loose about my throat. I might have been Ophelia, barring the flowers and the insanity.

There I sat by the open casement window, with a box of mignonette under my nose; with my candle first flickering in its socket, and then departing this life with a grievous smell, and with the summer dawn broadening across the pearl-gray sky. I had fallen neck and crop into love; it had not taken a minute doing, but for all that, it was as thoroughly done as if I had been walking in deliberately and gingerly for the last dozen years. Quite unexpectedly, when I was neither looking for nor thinking of any such thing, I had found a most precious stone, a pearl of great price, and

I must needs look at it on all sides, weigh it, and consider gravely to what best profit I could put it. One thing was certain, to no one's lot could it ever have fallen to have discovered so big a pearl; others might have hit upon smaller ones of the same genus, but in size and colour mine must be, have been, and ever will be unique.

The rain had ceased, and one star stole from behind the soft dense cloud-curtain, and trembled and shook in the distant ether. I fixed my excited sleepless eyes upon it. Had that far world any inhabitants? any beings like ourselves? men and women? were there any red-haired girls and handsome fair men there? If so, could there be any one living there now experiencing felicity equal to mine? most unlikely. Had any one in *this* world ever been possessed of such perfect bliss? Was papa as happy when he brought mamma back first to the dear old house, in the days when they planted that Westeria that covered half the south wall now? Mamma in a sad coloured gown, with a 'waist' under her arms, leg of mutton sleeves, and bob

curls, which was the aspect under which my deceased parent always presented herself to my mind's eye, being the form under which she was represented in a miniature that had hung, ever since I could recollect anything, over against papa's chair in the library? I decided not.

Was Dolly anything like as happy, when she was engaged to that pink-eyed young man of immense property, who died of consumption a week before his intended wedding-day. I taxed my memory to recollect any ejaculations expressive of ecstacy given utterance to by my sister, when in the rapturous position of betrothed to that poor, three-quarter-witted young Crœsus. The nearest approach to anything tender that I could recall, as having proceeded from her, was "that he was not quite such a fool as he looked."

When he died, I remembered that she cried a little, and went into mourning, and said that she wished she had been his widow, poor dear fellow, for 'that widows' caps were so becoming, and she should have liked to have paid that tribute of respect to his dear memory.

"What should I do if Dick were to die?" said I aloud, leaning my elbow on the sill, and addressing my question indifferently to the star and the mignonette box. 'Fall down dead on the spot probably, fall on his dead body, and die kissing him.

> "As Hero gave her trembling sighs to find
> Delicious death on wet Leander's lip."

To me it seemed, then, that to stand by and see Dick die, I living meanwhile, and surviving him, would be a physical impossibility. But if, by some miracle, I were to be unable thus to rid myself of life; if it were still to keep its undesired hated hold upon me, why—I'd take poison. Nothing could be simpler; arsenic, for instance, such as we set for the rats, and which made them swell to such a size, run so greedily to the spring to drink, and die there. "Should I swell so, and be so thirsty before I died?" I wondered. I hoped not. It was not a romantic thought, but it thrust itself in among its more sentimental brethren.

The pearl-gray sky turned red, then lilac, then rose, then azure. The sun came forth in his might, and the birds

began talking volubly all at once, singing hymns, and pæans, and blythe good-morrows' one after another. I rose from my seat, and began pacing up and down the room, with my hands locked together.

Why was I so happy? What had I done to deserve it? Why was God so good to me? Did He like me better than other people? Could it be that He chose favourites capriciously among his creatures? Had He so chosen me? or had He only given me this great boon to punish me more heavily by taking it away again? I fell on my knees, and begged and entreated God to visit me in any other way he should see fit; to send any loathsome agonizing sickness upon me; any form of suddenest, awfulest, cruelest death, but not to rob me of my yellow-haired lover. In what way this hallowed, chastened, pious prayer was granted, you, oh my unknown friends! shall see hereafter.

As I rose from my impromptu devotions, I inadvertently put my hand into my pocket and drew out the bank-notes which I had till that minute forgotten. I kissed each one separately, since Richard

might have touched it, locked them all up in a drawer with my Sunday bonnet and my best Bible, and then at length, when other decent folks were getting up, I took off my clothes, laid down and slept profoundly, till roused by the entrance of Mary, the apple-cheeked, with my hot water.

That day was marked by two incidents, both black in hue; that day papa went away for a week's visit to an old chum, and that day Dolly returned. I think the two occurrences stood somewhat in relation of cause and effect to each other. I think that my father, with a cowardice unworthy of his age and station, fled at the approach of his lovely Dorothea. Dear old gentleman, I forgave him his desertion, because I sympathized so with the occasion of it. I poured out his tea for him, packed up his clothes, and put sprigs of lavender among them to remind him sweetly of his old home and his little daughter, gave him my blessing, and sent him off.

"Good-by, dad," said I, hanging about his neck. "Don't catch cold, and don't

leave any of your pocket-handkerchiefs behind you, and don't leave me very long to Dolly's tender mercies, and come back soon."

Dolly arrived shortly afterwards. From the upper regions I heard her advent—heard the wheels of her chariot, "low on the sand and loud on the stone," rolling to the door. I went down with laggard steps to receive her. The noon sun was beating on the hall door, making the iron knobs red hot; beating, too, on the aged and dilapidated Collins, who stood on the flagstone, with his ugly old head waggling like a mandarin's, partly from ague, partly in greeting to the returned Dorothea. The cab stood piled with luggage in the blinding glare, and the poor cab horse, with its lean head drooping, feebly tried to swish away the flies from its thin flanks with its tail. I stood in speechless, lovelessadmiration, as Dolly daintily descended, fresh and trim, as if she had been travelling in cotton wool and silver paper, in a bandbox, instead of in dusty railway and mouldy chaise.

"Well, Nell," said she, presenting her

cool peach cheek to me, "how are you? Much the same as usual, I see—hair arranged with a pitchfork and dress with a view to ventilation."

I said nothing smart in reply to this fond greeting, because, as Johnson candidly avowed to the obsequious Bozzy, "I had nothing ready, sir." I followed Dolly meekly into the house, taking great care not to tread on her train. She had addressed to me but half a dozen words. I had not been above five seconds in her company, and yet she had compelled me to descend to the old standing ground miles below her. In her absence, I felt myself to be a lovable, admirable, rational woman; once again in her presence, I returned to my old station of *gauche*, charmless, witless, chool-girl.

CHAPTER XII.

LUNCHEON over, we betook ourselves (the weather being too hot to go out) to the hall, and there prepared for an afternoon of coma. The blinds were pulled down

"On purpose to keep out the light,"

but stealthy arrows crept through, and lay along the faded blue and red patches of the Turkey carpet, and the dim worsted work of the straight-backed chairs. It was profoundly still; one could *hear* the silence, which was only broken by the buzzing of the flies, on the window-pane. Dolly had thrown herself—nay, not *thrown*, for that suggests an idea of violence never conveyed by Dolly's roughest movement—had sunk into a rocking-chair, and sat swaying gently to and fro.

Miss Lestrange never read, and seldom

spoke in the family circle; I think she thought it waste of time. She knitted now, mute as Andersen's poor pretty mermaid, and meditated on heavenly themes, to judge by her countenance. I sat on a bench by the long table in the window; a tall bench, whence my legs dangled like gallows' birds, while my elbows rested on a big book, of which I read a page and a half. The book was Burton's "Anatomy of Melancholy," and it did not interest me in the least. I had selected it as being one of the biggest and most ponderous volumes in the library, as having likewise a ponderous title, promising to be good for edification; I, arguing, with faulty logic, that from so weighty a tome I must needs extract much weighty matter.

Truth to tell, I was deeply dissatisfied with myself, and with the weedy unstocked condition of my mind's fair garden. Dolly did well to despise me; I was but a poor creature, and despicable; foolishest, childishest, among women. I knew absolutely nothing; I had not the least idea what the Bill of Rights was about, nor who

fought the battle of Fontenoy, or any other battle either. Dick would despise me too when he came to know me better; would get tired of me, and find me insipid. Whether a more accurate knowledge of dates would make me a more original companion, I did not stop to inquire. To remedy my deficiencies, I turned to Burton, and asked him to tell me something about something; tell me a few facts, was my cry, like the little turnip in Kingsley's "Water Babies."

"Knowledge is power," is a true aphorism, I suppose; but, after all, what is all human knowledge? The sum of our knowing is to leave a deeper, more hopeless conviction of our utter unknowingness. What a *chétif* scrap of a science is mastered by the greatest proficient in, the foremost pioneer of that science? How the ripened spirits of the departed wise, bathing in wisdom's clear fount above, must smile, looking down on the smatterings of learning, on the strength of which we dub ourselves philosophers and pundits! Solomon, saith the Book of Kings, knew three thousand proverbs, and his songs

were a thousand and five. Doubtless; and yet assuredly there must have been ten times three thousand proverbs that he knew not—a hundred thousand songs never sung by him.

In the morning of this our little life, we set forth on some one of the many paths that lead to knowledge's citadel. The way is steep, but we are resolute; it is hedged with briars, and encumbered with great stones; the briars scratch us, and we break our shins over the stones, but we struggle on with a good courage. Our road is becoming smooth; we shall reach the prize in time. Then Death lays his numb hands on our hearts, and we are still, and the path is closed to us for ever. Is it for ever, though? Is not the pitiful incompleteness of our labours here, the fragmentary character of our best efforts, strongest, most convincing proofs of our soul's undyingness? Shall we not trace out in a nobler sphere that same path we loved on earth? the *same*, only with the briars cut down, and the stones cleared away? Will not our poor crooked lives be rounded into Wisdom's perfect circle?

Our Elysium is no occupationless, pleasureless *Ner wana* of swinish, plethoric repose; in our asphodel meadows we shall each of us have some mighty problem to work out, some godlike scheme to effect, and our brains will not tire, our eyes will not ache, and our hands not fail in the doing.

To what a distance have I strayed from myself, and my self-disgust? I have been up to heaven and down again. Burton's very detailed and minute analysis of the corporeal humours, which are melancholy's parents and grandparents, failed to enchain my attention. An idea struck me.

"Dolly," said I, and my sudden word cut the silence sharply.

"Well?"

"Do you know much, Dolly?"

"What do you mean?" measuredly came the words from her lips.

"I mean, do you know much about any sensible sort of things? Are you very well up in history and biography, and those sort of things?"

"Had not you better add 'Shakespeare and the musical glasses?' I suppose

am about as well informed as most other people."

Click, click, go her needles.

"Do you know enough to be able to teach me, I wonder?"

"Probably; my acquirements would be small else."

I pass by the sneer on the other side; it was but my ignorance's due.

"I wish you would give me lessons in something, Dolly; we used to learn German together once. Do you remember? Why cannot we begin again?"

"Thank you very much, but I'd infinitely rather be excused."

The long gray stocking grows under the swift white fingers; she ruffles her smooth brow in the agony of counting stitches.

"I'd do my best to get on; I'd do whatever you told me; I do feel my ignorance so oppressive, Dolly—quite a heavy burden."

"I'm extremely sorry to hear it, and I'm sure you'd make a delightful pupil, but I think, on the whole, I should prefer not. I don't want to qualify myself for a gover-

ness just yet, though I dare say that's what I shall have to come to."

I was baffled, and returned discouraged to my atrabilarious studies. Audible silence again for an hour or more; then the lower iron gate is heard creaking on its hinges, the gravel grating under approaching feet, and voices talking. Dolly is not above mundane curiosity; she rises and peeps softly round the curtain. "Mrs. Coxe," says she,

> "But no livelier than the dame
> That whispered 'Asses' Ears' among the sedge,"

"and a *man*" (with slight animation), "good-looking too," (with interest), "*very*," (with symptoms of excitement), "who is he? do you happen to know, Nell?"

"No-o-o," I stutter, "I don't think so."

"You *do* know," says she, paling a little with anger, "and why you should think it worth while to lie about such a trifle I cannot conceive; if his name is ever such a mystery I don't doubt I shall fathom it without your help."

No more in that strain; the key changes

to a "pathetic minor," for Collins entering announces "Mrs. Coxe and Major M'Gregor." Dolly's tongue was an instrument of great compass; it could play any tune from the Hundredth Psalm to "Wapping Old Stairs," and discourse excellent music. I did not, assuredly, expect my lover to kiss me, or take me in his arms then and there, but I felt a thrill of cold disappointment when I found him shaking hands with me in the same commonplace manner that Sir Hugh Lancaster or Mr. Bowles the curate might have done. He was presented by Mrs. Coxe to Dolly, who smiled pensively, and cast down her eyes.

I made no attempt to entertain our guests, but clave to my tall bench, and my folio. I remember I read one inverted sentence over six times running, without a glimmering of its meaning penetrating to my brain. Dick came over presently, and looked over my shoulder.

"What light literature have you got there?"

I turn to the title-page and point gravely, Burton's "Anatomy of Melancholy."

"H'm! cheerful kind of title! and is that Mr. Burton himself? Rum old party, isn't he?"

The curled Greek head stoops lower; the amber moustache touches my ear.

"Did you get home all right last night, Nell?"

"Yes."

"Did not catch a cold?"

"No."

"Nor get a blowing up?"

"No."

"That's all right; where's your father to-day?"

"Gone into Berkshire for a week."

"H'm! when the cat's away you know; and so that's Miss Dolly, is it?"

"Yes, isn't she lovely?"

Thus I ask, unknowing that never will man, come to years of discretion, be betrayed into the smallest commendation of one woman's beauty to another.

"Oh, I don't know; I haven't thought about it; I suppose I have been thinking too much of how lovely somebody else is."

"Who?" ask I, looking up with inno-

cent inquiry; but somehow I read in the deep loving eyes who it is, and I begin to fiddle nervously with good Master Burton's yellowing leaves. Dolly's voice breaks upon my trance; it comes cooing softly across the hall.

"Nelly, dear, will you kindly run and get my portfolio of Bournemouth sketches; Mrs. Coxe is good enough to say she should like to see them; do go, there's a dear child! they are in the left top corner of my chiffonier; you cannot miss finding them."

I rise and go reluctant; I misdoubt me concerning Dolly and her sketches. They are not in the left top corner of the chiffonier, nor indeed in the chiffonier at all, and it takes me ten minutes diligent search to find them. When I return, the position of affairs is changed, which does not tend to the ameliorating of my temper. Dick is balancing himself on a three-legged stool within six inches of Dolly's knee, and she (her knitting dropped, her soul in her eyes) is gazing at him with mournful absorption, while he narrates some trivial incident of everyday life.

I move a small table in front of Mrs. Coxe, place the portfolio upon it, and retire to my distant corner, fully expecting my handsome Gilderoy to come and share my solitude. Whether he would have done so or not is a question now to be classed with such as "What would have been the course of English history had Queen Elizabeth married Philip of Spain? or had Richard Cromwell been the man his father was? or what would have been the fate of Norwich, if the man in the moon had not come down too soon?" Whatever Dick's intentions were, Dolly was too prompt for him.

"Oh, Mrs. Coxe," cried she, sinking on her knees, in the prettiest attitude of despair, beside that lady, who, being short-sighted, was holding one of my sister's artistic efforts, within a quarter of an inch of her snub nose, *feeling* its beauties with that sensitive feature, "Oh, Mrs. Coxe, I could not possibly think of letting you examine my poor little daubs so critically; you'd find as many faults in them as there are stars in heaven. They ought to be looked at at the distance of

half a mile at least; Major M'Gregor" (diffidently, with a slight tremor in her voice), "would it trouble you very much, or *could* you, *would* you be so very kind as to hold up this *one*, only *just* this *one*, at the proper distance, for Mrs. Coxe to see? There, oh thanks so much. Nothing could be better! Oh, *how* good you are!"

Poor Mrs. Coxe screws up her eyes, and peers, and succeeds in discerning a confused blotch of blue and green and yellow.

"H'm! h'm! yes! yes!" says she, knowing that say something she must. "What a fine bit of colouring! and how well you have managed that patch of light on the hill-side!"

"It isn't a patch of light, Mrs. Coxe—it's a white cow," says Dolly, sweetly, correcting her.

Mrs. Coxe has her back to me, but by the wobbling motion of her big blue feather, I see that she is discomfited. I grin a ghastly grin.

"It's a shame to detain you so long, Major M'Gregor, isn't it?" asks Dolly, speaking with some little effort, in her

coyness, at having to address a stranger again. "Nelly is show-woman generally, and a very good one she is too, but somehow she seems a little knocked up with the heat or something to-day."

"I'm not the least knocked up," growl I, "brief and stern," as the skipper in the song.

"Aren't you, dear? I'm glad of that; I thought you were. You see, Major M'Gregor, you're the only gentleman to-day, and we think we have a right to make a sort of slave of you—don't we, Mrs. Coxe?" The soft fawn eyes seek his with timid deprecation, and then droop suddenly, and the velvet cheeks deepen in colour to the hue of a dog-rose's heart. Dick, of course, protests that if there is one employment he loves above another it is holding up water-colour sketches at arm's length for his hostess's inspection. If it is an irksome task to him, he disguises his tedium under it uncommonly well. I meanwhile bite my nails, my lips, the top of a pencil, and anything else I can lay my teeth on. There are about a hundred sketches, and on each one Mrs.

Coxe has to make comments; some few as fortunate as the one I have recorded; some more, some less so. At length they come to an end, and our guests rise to depart. I take a sudden resolution; nobody shall hinder me; the bit is between my teeth. I would open the hall-door myself for our visitors.

"Nelly, dear," cooes my sister-cushat, "will you ring the bell for Collins to open the door?"

"No," said I, doughtily, "I *will not*; I'll open it myself."

Dick was looking at her, and she could not scowl prohibition at me; but I think she made a little memorandum of it. However, I gained my point; ran and opened the heavy door while Dolly remained in the inner room. Mrs. Coxe passed out first, and having so passed was good-natured, and "never looked behind."

Dick loitered, and (Mrs. Coxe's extensive back being turned) took my face between his two broad hands.

"Bad luck, Nell! bad luck!" he said, a little disappointedly, "not five words with you to-day!"

"No," said I, and my countenance was troubled, "nor you won't either, now Dolly has come home!"

"Dolly be hanged!" said he, irreverently. "We must pack her off pretty quick if she spoils our sport, mus'n't we? but she won't, I'm sure; she looks good-natured; she'll help us."

I shook my head.

"Give me one kiss, pretty one, to take away with me; nobody's looking!"

Our lips met—met joyfully, clingingly; parted grudgingly.

"*One* more, Nell!"

"No, no no! Mrs. Coxe will turn round."

"Mrs. Coxe will do nothing of the kind; Mrs. Coxe is a sensible woman, and minds her own business."

"Indeed, *indeed*, you ought to go and open the gate for her," I said, wrenching my countenance out of his hands.

"In a minute, in a minute! no hurry. Nell, you're looking rather pretty to-day, only your cheeks want pinching or doing something to, to put a little colour into them."

"They never have any colour; it would not look natural."

"Well, then, I suppose I must put up with them, ugly as they are! Nell, where will you come and meet me to-night?"

My eyes clave to his face, and feasted on its beauty. I would have gone to meet him in a dungeon, in a charnel, in death's stronghold itself. The door to the hall opened softly, and he dropped my hand like a hot potato. Enter Dolly, not a whit discomposed by her position of Mar Plot.

"I thought," she said, suavely, "that this might be your stick, and that you had forgotten it!"

So speaking, she held up a walking-stick for his inspection. It had been in papa's possession full twenty years, and she knew it.

"Oh, thanks, thanks; no, it isn't mine; I've got mine here. Well, I won't keep you out in the sun any longer—good morning!"

Thus he departed. My wrath surged and boiled like broth in a pot.

"You knew that stick wasn't his, Dolly?" quoth I, irefully.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Hein! if I did, what then? One little ruse is as good as another, isn't it? Your little ruse was the hall-door, mine was the walking-stick, that's all; quits, don't you see?"

I did not see, nor did I vouchsafe another word to Dorothea that evening.

CHAPTER XIII.

"For lo! the winter is past; the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing birds is come; and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land."

It is not the fashion to quote canticles I am aware, but I cannot help that; it seems to me the exquisitest, joyfullest love song ever penned. It translates the spirit and essence of the spring into words. Spring out of doors, and spring in my heart, the turtle's voice was heard there too.

> "This world is very lovely, oh my God,
> I thank thee that I live,"

say I, spontatively, descending suddenly from the "Song of Solomon," to that of Mr. Alexander Smith. I could spout tomes of verse to-day; I cannot amble peaceably along the high road of prose;

it is too level, too dusty, I must go cantering up the green slopes of poetry. I am craning my long young neck out of the morning-room window, which is barred, and there is only just room for my head to get egress between the bars; but the May air imperatively demands to be sniffed—so with my nose aloft, I am sniffing 'bouquet de printemps,' an odour which if it could but be corked up in bottles and sold, would make the fortune of any rival of Piesse and Lubin instantaneously. "I thank thee that I live," repeat I piously, in recitative, while my round white chin rests on the knuckles of my two hands.

"Thank Him that you live!" says Dolly, from the table where she is turning over the pages of *Le Follet*, "do you? well then I must say that you are thankful for small favours. Life in an old barrack with no present income, and no future prospects, hardly seems to me a theme for Hallelujahs; for weeping and gnashing of teeth rather."

"I would not gnash my teeth if I were you, Dolly!" say I, with sarcasm, which

is a weapon I but seldom use, as it mostly cuts my own fingers, when I lay hold of it, "or you may break them, and that would seriously diminish your value in the market."

"Market, indeed!" echoes Dolly, interrupting herself in the perusal of a *toilette de promenade.* "This little pig does not go to market, and very sorry she is for it too; she might have all her teeth drawn and knocked out, or gnashed out, and nobody would be the wiser. Alas! alas! there are no pig dealers in this Sahara."

"Why on earth do you come back to this Sahara, that you are always sneering at? who asks you? who wants you?" inquire I, in a rage, withdrawing my head from between the bars, and grazing my ears.

"One must come home now and then," replies Dolly, quietly; *she* never gets into a rage; she thinks it *roturier,* "or else people would say that one had been turned out of doors for misconduct, or that one's papa was in gaol, or that one emanated from the Foundling, or something equally distressing."

"Thro' plea—sures and pal—a—ces tho—o—o I roam,
Be it ev—er so hum—ble there's no—o place like home,"

warble I, lifting up my voice, being utterly unable to abstain from metre to-day.

"As for palaces," says Dolly, closing *Le Follet*, "they have not been much in my line; except the Bishop's indeed, when we go to propagate the gospel, or the negroes, or something there; and as for pleasures, one has to forage for one's own little bit of amusement certainly; but I quite agree with you as to there being no place *like* home, not the least like; for utter destitution of paint, and decent cookery, and hot-water pipes, and all the appliances of modern civilization, this baronial residence is undoubtedly unique." Blasphemy, flat blasphemy wasn't it?

"*You*," say I, drawing myself up to my five foot six inches, and sputtering in my desire to get out my words fast enough, "*you* put paint, and *good eating* (very scornfully), and hot-water pipes above honour and glory, and Cressy and Agincourt and— (my historical knowledge exhausts itself here), and all that sort of thing; *I* don't!"

Dolly says, "Agincourt a fiddle!" a sentence, the construing of which will tax the acumen of the New Zealand commentator a couple of thousand years hence; to which remote period this immortal work will undoubtedly descend. "Agincourt a fiddle! does the knowledge that one lot of mouldy old men poked another mouldy old lot in the ribs with pikes four hundred years ago make me feel the draughts less, or you look less like a scarecrow?"

"By the tombs of my ancestors!" always seemed to me the weakest oath ever invented; "by the tail of my dog," or "by the whiskers of my cat," would be to me every bit as impressive and binding. "*You* are not everybody," reply I shortly, which, though not much to the point, was undeniably true.

"I wonder now," pursues Dolly, speculatively stretching out her arms lazily, and yawning—"dear! how sleepy this weather makes one—I wonder now whether that mighty man of valour, what's-his-name, that was here yesterday, I wonder whether he has any forbears."

"Oh yes, lots," say I, hastily, whisking my face round for my sister's scrutiny, and then I reflect that I have spoken without authority, and that M'Gregor may be as innocent of a grandpapa as his friend Coxe, for all I know to the contrary.

"How do you know that?" asks Dolly, sceptically, "does he carry them about stuffed with him?"

I laugh explosively, "Not that I know of; no more do we, and yet we have them all the same but — but M'Gregor is a good name you know, quite—quite historical."

"If you come to that, so is *Coxe*; there were Cocks that strutted out of the ark, and pecked and crowed on the top of Mount Ararat."

I lean my cheek, which is growing as red as the wattles of any cock that ever was hatched, against the cold iron window-bars to cool it, and say with diffidence, "But — but — Sir Walter Scott?"

"Oh ho!" says Dolly, drawing a deep inspiration, and shaping her pretty red

mouth into the form for a whistle, from which unfeminine phonetic exercise she however refrained. "Oh ho! he's a Rob Roy, is he? a mighty freebooter? We must be looking after the cows and pigs, or he'll be making a raid upon them to prove his descent!"

"I don't *know* of course," say I modestly, "any more than you; I only thought" —grasping the friendly bar spasmodically, "such an uncommon name—so pretty—" mumbling off into unintelligibility.

"He cannot be anybody *much*," pursues Dolly disparagingly, taking up a pencil and beginning to scribble faces on a bit of paper, "or he would not be staying with the Coxes. The Coxes are working up, undeniably; as undeniably as we are working down, but they have not got up many rungs yet. I suppose they think that they will begin with decayed gentlemen, and hoist themselves up on their shoulders into the society of prosperous ones; rather sharp of them."

"Lord Frampton dines with the Coxes, and so does Sir Hugh Lancaster," cry I, eagerly; earnestly desiring that I had

Richard's letters patent of nobility in my pocket to pull out, and fling in triumph on the table, under Dolly's unbelieving nose.

"Pooh!" says Dolly, demolishing my poor little plea, with one inflexion of her voice, "Sir Hugh is hail-fellow-well-met with every pettifogging little attorney in Nantford, and Lord Frampton remembers that Parliaments are septennial, and would dine with Old Nick, if he would give his second son a plumper, and besides, *dining* is a different thing; that god-like animal, man, is always governed by his stomach, don't you know that? And worthy *Călico's* Burgundy and made dishes are worth undergoing a little *infra dig-ness* for; but this man is evidently on quite an *ami de la maison* footing."

There is a minute or two of silence, during which Dolly goes on making spirited little fancy sketches, with a black nibbed pencil; she is so handy with her fingers—and I sit biting my nails like giant Pope, and cudgelling my small brains for some remark of Dick's tending to prove that he was not on terms of intimacy with the

Coxes; that it was either business, or good nature, or convenience that had brought, and now kept him there; with all my cudgelling this was all I could cudgel out.

"He thinks them vulgar himself, Dolly, I'm sure; he said one day, that Mrs. Coxe was too fond of the peerage."

"Did he?" replies Dolly, "how ill-bred of him! A man must be rather low before he will go and stay weeks in a tradesman's family, and be tame cat about his house; but he must be lower still to abuse his hosts behind their backs to a perfect stranger; that does not sound like *sang pur*."

"The King can do no wrong," the old Divine Right Tories used to say; "Major M'Gregor can do no right," appears to be my sister's version.

"It was not abusing her," cry I, hotly, "to say that she was fond of the peerage, any more than it would be abusing you to say you were fond of dress or society, or your own way, as you are; it was only stating a fact."

"I thought," says Miss Lestrange, very

calmly, "that you adduced that speech to prove that he was no great friend of the Coxes; if it was not intended for abuse it proves nothing."

The honeysuckles are thrusting themselves in so forwardly at the casement, sending their delicatest, divinest odour up my nostrils, which are inflated like Vivien's when Merlin called her ugly names, with "sharp breaths of anger." They are sad radicals those honeysuckles; they would do just as much for an old fish-wife, they are saying all they can in their refined smell language to soothe me, and reconcile me to the humble *locus standi* of my lover. They are humble themselves; they twist their pale coronets to crown every hedge; they are flecked with the common summer dust, and plucked by little ragged children to stick in earthenware mugs in the dim cottage windows.

"Rob Roy is a new acquisition. He did not grace these wilds when last I was at home; he was still sporting among his native thistles, I suppose. Have you known him long?"

"Ye-es; at least—I suppose—not very long."

"How long?"

(How long, indeed! according to the almanack of the soul, a lifetime, longer than old Parr's, an Æon; according to the prosaic humdrum almanack of the pocket-books, about a week or ten days.)

"I think—about a fortnight," I answer, slowly. My head is turned away, but I feel with some sixth sense that Dolly has suspended her art-labours and is looking at me, but I flatter myself that with all her knowledge of physiognomy, she will be puzzled to extract much emotion from a washed-out brown holland back, and a huge loose knot of bronze hair.

"And where," continues Dolly, with a malicious little laugh, "may I ask, was the favoured spot where so much valour and so much beauty first met?

"'We first met at a ball, where our hands did entwine,
And I did squeeze his hand and he did mine.'

Was that it?" Dignified silence on my part. "I wish, my good child, that you would be so kind as to turn your countenance round this way, and not act as if

you had a face each side your head, like Janus."

I have been so much accustomed from my youth up to put in practice the injunctions of that ingenious quatrain,

> "Go where you're told,
> Do what you're bid,
> Shut the door after you,
> Never be chid;"

(only that the last line is not true in my case, as I frequently am chid), that I comply.

"Where was it?"

"In the churchyard," in a very low, reluctant voice; it seems profaning the sanctity of that first blest interview to let in the garish day of Dolly's sneers upon it.

"What a cheerful rendezvous! Has old Iken's mantle, or rather spade, fallen upon Mr. M'Gregor; was the canny Scot turning an honest penny digging graves?"

"I wish he had been digging yours, and you were in it now," say I, but to myself. Moses was the meekest man upon earth, but it is my firm belief that he would have turned and rent either

Aaron or Miriam, if they had attempted to badger him in the way my sister was badgering me.

"Was it on a Sunday?"

"No."

"What took you to the churchyard, then?"

"My legs."

"Ah! how humorous! and if it is not an impertinent question, who introduced Sandy—is his name Sandy—to his Nell?"

"Nobody."

"Ah, to be sure! No doubt a friend of the Coxes would dispense with such preliminaries. I suppose in calico circles such checks upon the graceful freedom of social intercourse are voted superfluous."

My angry passions are rising like well-leavened bread; like a river after autumn rains; like quicksilver in fine weather.

"I suppose," says Dolly, leaning back her little snooded head among the sofa cushions, and surveying me from under the blue-veined marvel of her white lids, "I suppose that, like Artemus Ward and his Free Lover, you mutually ejaculated,

'You air my affinity,' and rushed into each other's arms."

The cup is full and brims over; the kettle has overboiled; the river has risen level with its banks, and is pouring madly over them.

"No!" say I, jumping off the window-seat and stamping, "we did not; and if we had, we should not have asked your leave. You may rush into the arms of any man or devil in England, and the sooner the better! God knows I would not stop you. I'd push you on, though I should pity Satan himself if he got you, so stop your sneers at people whose shoe-strings you are not worthy to tie!"

I had vague Scriptural ideas running in my head, you know, or I should have remembered that Dick was not in the habit of wearing shoes, and "whose shooting-boots you are not worthy to unlace," would not have sounded half so withering. Dolly unbuttons her languid eyes, that look out of place anywhere but in a Seraglio, about the hundredth part of an inch. Being "threeped at," as the servants call it, is for her a new sensation.

"That'll do," she says, coldly, "it's too hot for towrows. Stamp a little harder on these worm-eaten old boards, and you'll find yourself in the cellar, reclining in one of the empty wine-bins."

The tornado of my wrath is moderating to a stiffish breeze, as, after having wrecked half-a-dozen vessels, and dismasted half-a-hundred, an equinoxial gale is content to fret and bluster itself into comparative peace; but in both cases the sea still seethes and works like must.

"I really thought," continues Dolly, gravely, having laid aside her mocking tone, "I really thought, Nell, that you could take a joke better; for you could hardly suppose that I meant *really* that a Lestrange would submit to any familiarity from a Coxian *protégé*. No, no; we do not hold our heads so high in the world as we did, but it will take two generations more to bring us down to *that* depth; that would be fulfilling the prophecy, 'they that were clad in scarlet embrace dung-hills,' with a vengeance."

I hardly relish this bold trope, being moreover guiltily conscious of having

fulfilled the prophecy, and embraced the dunghill.

"No! no!" fanning herself gently, with the advertisement sheet of the *Times*; "everything after its kind; like and like; *Cocks* and Hens, and Lestranges, and gentlemen; probably, from the docile way in which that man trots about at Mrs. Coxe's apron-strings, and fetches and carries for her, he must be engaged to Amaryllis; they are going to try and mix a little poor blue blood, if it *is* blue, which is open to question, with their own full-bodied red."

"He would not touch Amaryllis with a pair of tongs," cry I, digging my nails deep into my pink palms, and making them pinker still.

"H-m," with a cynical motion of the shoulders, "hungry dogs eat dirty pudding, and Amaryllis' *dot* would go far towards re-stocking the kail yard that I suppose he has somewhere in Auld Reekie."

"You see further into a millstone than most people, that's evident," I say, derisively.

"No, I don't; I only see what's under

my nose, and heaven forbid my setting up as a matchmaker, the vulgarest amusement a vacant mind can have; but, somehow, the world's pulse does not seem to beat in this remote corner; one has so little to think about that one is reduced to silly gossipy speculations about one's neighbour's concerns."

"I'd speculate something a little more probable while I was about it," is my indignant comment, and being unable to trust myself either to say, or refrain from saying more, I move towards the tall sombre door, and pass through it into the dim wide hall.

CHAPTER XIV.

I DON'T think I like the word *Nature*, it sounds hard and dry and unfriendly; a chilly abstraction instead of the homely familiar assemblage of green fields and hedges and muddy lanes, and cows and donkeys, and rivers that it is intended to represent. However, I suppose until our language grows richer by a more satisfactory term, I must be content to make use of it. Dear mother Nature, after all is said and done, is far pleasanter than most specimens of Human Nature. She has been bespattered with a great deal of ill-fitting praise and undeserved abuse, for not sympathizing sufficiently with the howlings and throes and yearnings of aspiring and dyspeptic bards, for not howling and yearning with them, but after all she is quite sympathetic enough. She does not indeed disfigure her pretty

face with crying for us when we die, why should she? She will die herself some day, she knows; but when our own kind cast us out, she takes us to her motherly breast, and wraps her fresh, sweet-smelling earth-cloak about us. And then, while we are yet alive, what a friendly companion she is! not too demonstrative, and such a good listener; lets us say what we please, never contradicts us, nor gives us bits of advice, or pieces of her mind.

I pick up my hat (it cost seven pence half-penny originally, and has been in wear three summers) from off the settle, and pass through the swing door and the offices to the kitchen, with the raftered ceiling and huge broad fire-place. A very thin curl of blue smoke is going up its wide throat now; we need but little fire to do our minute portion of cooking. Times are changed since oxen were roasted whole, and old October brewed at Lestrange. When the last Lestrange came of age, I don't think even a chicken was roasted whole in honour of the event; well! we shall be extinct next generation, and time for us!

"The old order changeth; giving place to new,
And God fulfils himself in many ways."

Mrs. Smith is sitting in one sunny window, a little orange tree in a pot that she has raised from a pip stands on the sill; it has shot up very tall and drawn from the heat of the kitchen. Mrs. Smith is shredding beans into a willow pattern dish. Coming events cast their shadows before, and we are evidently going to have beans and bacon for luncheon. Beans cost nothing, and bacon not much, so they are a very favourite and frequently recurring *mets* in our bills of fare. I stand by her for a minute or two in silence; so, finding that, like a ghost, I require to be spoken to first, she lifts up her kind homely face, and says:

"I'm afraid you're a bit lonesome to-day, my dear, your pa gone and all; I 'ope 'e's got all right to his journey's hend; I don't put much faith in them ould trains, and Miss Dolly is not much company for you, is she?"

"No," say I, taking up one of the empty pods, and looking at the short white down upon it; "but I don't want

company," and then I leave her with the warm sun streaming in on her little sickly orange tree, with its dusty dark leaves, on her black net cap and faded purple ribbons, and on her pale smooth beans. I pass through the house-yard, where a scullion "fat and foolish" as the one that was scouring a fish-kettle at Shandy Hall when the news of Master Bobby's death arrived, is pumping into a bucket, with her great red arms, and where the old tom-cat is couching on the top of the wall, with his tail curled round his toes, one eye shut, and the other keeping wily watch upon the movements of a very young, naked, and clumsy bird on the beech bough above him.

There was a little book came out some years ago, which I believe had a great run among the spinsters of Britain, entitled "Work: Plenty to do, and How to do It," and with an emblematic beehive blazing on its small blue back. I had no work to do, and should not have done it if I had. How would the ingenious author have dealt with me? The gate into the ten acres stands open, and I enter.

Our hay is not cut yet, it will be a month yet before the grass and the flowers' sweet death make all the land one nosegay; a month before, from my bedroom window in the early morning, I see the long row of haymakers bending to their scythes; before I see their ladies wearying their strong horn-hands with tossing the hay in the warm dry air, and raking it together with their big blunt-toothed rakes through the long summer days.

I made hay houses up to a very very few years ago, went on making them until my commanding height and Dolly's ridicule compelled me to relinquish my unseemly sport; even now, though I have been to a dinner party, and set up a lover, my soul hankers after the forbidden fruit.

Regardless of the injury I am doing to the crop, I throw myself down full length, shaded by a sycamore, which ought not to be in the hedgerow and is. The grasses are so very tall, they stand up inches above my prostrate form; I can see the little summer flies walking up the stalks

of the ladies' smocks, and into the faint sweet flowers.

I clasp my hands at the back of my head and lie very still, so still that a little blue butterfly settles on my breast, and opens and closes its white-lined wings slowly in the sun; and green dragon flies go whirring confidently past, almost brushing my nose as they sail gauzily by. There is a path through this field, a right of way; in litigation about which my worthy grandpapa, whose money always burnt a hole in his pocket, spent hundreds fifty years ago, but very few people ever pass along it. Nobody is passing along it now: this midday is as utterly mute as any midnight.

From my low bed I look straight into the sycamore; I see the coy little shadows playing hide and seek; see wonderful quivuering lights; see the leaves in all the bravery of their new attire—some have put it on but this morning, and here and there Heaven's blue eyes looking through the green windows. The yellow light and the staring up make my eyes ache at last, so I turn them away and look through the

grass forest round me, through "the oat grass and the sword grass" off far away to the horizon. I always fancy that the bridge at the World's End, at which the youngest of the three prince brothers in the fairy tale invariably arrives, must be somewhere over there.

A very busy bee mistakes my right eye for a flower, and attempts to go into it; complimentary but not pleasant; to prevent the recurrence of such mistakes I close both eyes. When any one in a moderately comfortable position of body, and with any sin less than murder on his soul, takes to closing his or her eyes on a drowsy windless May day like this, there can be but one result; the result accomplishes itself in my case, and I fall asleep. Heaven knows what I dream about, some ridiculous *pot pourri* of impossibilities; but all of a sudden I jump half out of my skin, and start up. A man stands beside me; not Dick nor Sir Hugh, for what should they be doing trespassing in our ten acres? but

"A little glassy-headed hairless man,"

Collins, in fact, in that striped linen jacket and generally *dégagé* costume in which he usually blooms through the forenoon.

"*How* you startled me!"

"If you please, ma'am," (for Collins, though of indisputable antiquity and not in the best repair, has sufficient remnant of good feeling and resemblance to a decent servant not to say "if you please, *Miss*,") "if you please, ma'am, there's a genelman in the libery, and Miss Lestrange sent me to look for you to come to him."

"A gentleman!" I cry, with as much animation as if I were a second Miranda, whose acquaintance with gentlemen was confined to her papa and Caliban, "and Miss Lestrange sent for me?"

"Yes, 'm; told me to 'unt heverywhere for you."

(Dick, of course, I say to myself. Well done, Dolly, your bark is worse than your bite).

"And what is the name of the gentleman?" to make assurance doubly sure.

"Well 'm, I were hout when he come, so *Hann* went to the door, and she says

'she could not take her hoath, but if she was to die next minute she should say it was Sir Hugh Lankyster."

"Sir Hugh Lancaster!" with infinite disgust, "then why on earth did you not say so before?"

I throw myself down again in a pet.

"You may go; I shan't come."

"But if you please, 'm, Miss Lestrange——"

"What do I care for Miss Lestrange! Say that you could not find me."

Collins retires, discomfited, and as the last glimpse of his bald head and round shoulders disappear round the corner, I change my mind; chiefly, I think, because I see that there is no one to try and do it for me. "Half a loaf is better than no bread," and a man, even though he be not *the* man, is better than nothing. Cleopatra was but true to the instincts of her sex when she said,

> "I have no men to govern in this wood,
> That makes my only woe."

I effect a compromise with my dignity, by walking as slowly as I possibly can to

the house, and entering the library with an air of ostentatious indifference.

"Here you are! That's all right," says Sir Hugh, jumping up, and in that jolly tone which is peculiar to him.

"Jolly" is Sir Hugh's own epithet, as "venerable" is Bede's, and "pious" Eneas's. Other people may be, and no doubt are jolly, venerable, and pious, though perhaps not all three at once; but these three men are the representatives, *par excellence*, of these qualities. Hugh reminds one somehow of the tone of Dickens' books; there is a broad, healthy geniality about him; he is like a wood fire on a frosty day.

"Did Collins find you?" asks Dolly.

I say, surlily, "Evidently, or I should not be here."

Dolly never wrangles in public; she remembers to *laver* her *linge sale* at home, and not give her acquaintance the benefit of it.

"Where were you?"

"In the Ten Acres. I was asleep, and he woke me, and gave me *such* a start." (pouting).

"Taking a siesta, were you?" says

Hugh; "best thing to be done to-day; melting, isn't it? My bailiff, who is very weather wise, says we are to have thunder before many days are over."

"I'm sure I hope so," Dolly says, languidly, "for it would cool the air, and prevent our all being reduced to little spots of grease."

"I'm sure I hope not," growl I, contradictiously.

"Why?" asks Hugh, who, I suppose, thinks that I most resemble the rooks, who say nothing without cause (caws).

"Because it frightens me out of my wits. It is not a pleasant idea that you may be alive and well one minute, and as black as a coal and as dead as a door-nail the next."

Sir Hugh shows all his front teeth—and they really are his own, I do believe, his own by right of birth and not of purchase—in a laugh; he is as easily moved to mirth as a child at a pantomime.

"It doesn't sound very cheerful, certainly, when you put it so forcibly; but it is such an infinitesimal chance—a million to one. You don't mean to say that you

do really funk—that you are really frightened I mean, at thunder? I should have thought that you were afraid of nothing."

"I am, though. I always tie something over my eyes, and go down into the cellar. Don't I, Dolly?"

"I can't say that you are remarkable for *physical* courage," replies Dolly, with a slight emphasis on the word; "but it's an unnecessary quality in a woman, only makes Jaels, and Judiths, and Madame Rolands of them, doesn't it, Sir Hugh?"

Sir Hugh says "he supposes so," and the electric topic seems exhausted.

Dolly and I are sitting on the sofa, side by side.

"My dear child," says the former—in that maternal, elder sister, guardian angel strain which makes casual old lady-callers remark that "Miss Lestrange is like a mother to her younger sister"—"what have you been doing with yourself? You are covered with bits of grass, and sticks and stones enough to make a rook's nest. She is a regular Madge Wildfire, isn't she?"

Sir Hugh thinks it would be rude to me to agree with Dolly, and rude to her to disagree with her; so he holds his tongue and looks wise, as if he could say a great deal, but would not. The window is exactly opposite, and Dolly is looking out of it. Suddenly she rises and walks quickly, but without ungraceful hurry, over to it.

"Don't you think it would be pleasanter to have this blind down a bit? The sun does beat so very powerfully on this side of the house in the forenoon;" and, without waiting to collect our suffrages on the subject, she pulls it down. "Do you know, Nelly, poor Sir Hugh has had such a disappointment this morning. He came over to have a talk with papa about those dwarf espaliers. You won't mind trying to be a bad substitute, will you, and taking him to see them?"

"Why can't you go yourself?" ask I, not too civilly.

"*I*," (with a laugh and a shrug). "What do I know about dwarf espaliers? I'm a regular cockney in all gardening matters."

"Never mind, it will do just as well any other day. I don't want to bore Miss Eleanor," says Sir Hugh, good-naturedly, but looking rather vexed, for he is a great and zealous gardener, and no one likes to feel themselves shirked.

I recollect myself, and call to mind how sharply my father took me up for snubbing Sir Hugh the other day.

"Oh, no; I don't mind much," I say, ungraciously enough. "Come along."

"Go through the garden door, it is open," says Dolly, following us out to see that we take her advice.

"You had better come too, Dolly," I say.

Hugh does not back my invitation.

"No, no" (with a sweet benedictory smile, which seems to say, like the 'heavy father' in the fifth act of a melodrama, 'Bless you, my children'). "Two are company and three are none; and, besides, the sun makes my head ache."

"How much better your rhododendrons do than ours," says Sir Hugh, stopping as we pass a great sloping bank of lilac blossoms; "can't make it out."

"We got plenty of bog earth for them from Brinley Heath," I say, looking down at my boots, and wondering whether my companion has yet discovered the yawning rift in the side of the left one.

"I see your father has let the land up to the very windows."

"Yes, he had to," I say, with a sigh; somehow, I don't much mind Hugh knowing our poverty.

We walk on silently for a minute or two. I think that Hugh is wishing it was not an insult for a rich gentleman to offer a poor gentleman money.

"What a jolly old place it is! I wish I could pick it up, and pop it down half a score miles nearer Wentworth."

"Do you?" in rather a dissentient tone.

"Yes, I do. Why, you see my mother is getting into years. It's a long way for her to come pounding over here. She is not so active as she was once, and I want you and her to know each other better."

Me *and Lady Lancaster!* why, on earth? I should not have been more astonished had he expressed a wish to see me and the Duchess of Cambridge on terms

of intimacy; (*bien obligé*, but I think that that cast iron old lady would hardly be a meet playfellow for me.) Hugh looks straight before him; I think he thinks me inconveniently innocent.

"I wish you'd let us put you and your sister up at Wentworth, while Sir Adrian is away; you think my mother rather alarming, don't you; and she does cut up rough now and then, certainly, but what old woman doesn't?"

"I suppose they mostly are rather cross," I say, sedately, "and old men too!" I add, from a feeling of equity to my own sex.

"If you do come, you must come soon," continues Hugh, as we tramp together over the daisies that flourish unspudded upon our sward, "for in a fortnight or three weeks the old lady is off to town!"

"Are you going with her?"

"Oh yes, of course; though there's nothing in life I hate so much. Swelling about St. James' Street, in one's go-to-meeting clothes, and being squashed as flat as a pancake on some old dowager's

stairs, aren't much in my line; I'd a deal sooner be sowing mangolds, or planting potatoes; beastly hole, London!"

Sir Hugh is bucolic, you see; he has not Pope's admiration of "the town."

"Dear me, how odd!" exclaim I, with genuine surprise; my views of the metropolis are formed on the Whittingtonian and streets-paved-with-gold plan. "I should like to go to London of all things; I want to see the Tower, and the British Museum, and the Wax Works."

Sir Hugh bursts out laughing.

"God bless my soul! what an extraordinary notion; you'd hardly find it pay, I think, travelling a hundred and twenty miles to see Rush and Palmer and Townley, staring at you like stuck pigs."

I never have any great opinion of my own sapience, but I perceive that in my last observation I have considerably exceeded my usual standard of silliness, and so I am relieved at finding that we have reached our goal, the *potager*. Having called our old gardener, who is involuntarily practising the virtue of tem-

perance over a hunk of cheese and an onion, to my assistance, I stand by for about ten minutes, and listen, not without amusement, to Sir Hugh and him mangling the French words with their clumsy British tongues, while I entertain myself consuming infantine peas. I have embarked on my seventeenth pod, and the others are deep in *Bons Chrétiens* and *Beurrés d'Alemberg,* when the sound of footsteps and voices in a duet, approaching, make me turn my head. Hugh does ditto.

"Hallo! here's your sister come out, after all! And who on earth has she got hold of? a good many yards of him anyhow! Why it's M'Gregor, as I'm alive! I did not know that you knew him." Dolly is holding up a little gray parasol, and has tied a small *fichu* over her head; she has a white gown on, and her modest eyes are cast down; altogether one would say that she was about to be confirmed. M'Gregor comes *mowing* along beside her; rarely, rarely can a plunger walk.

"Why, M'Gregor, my dear fellow, how are you? I thought you had mizzled from

these parts a week ago; why have not you been to look us up?"

Major M'Gregor takes his hat off to me; I am in disgrace apparently; not good enough to be shaken hands with.

"I did say something to Coxe about it, but he did not seem to care about lending me a nag, and I'm not particularly partial to pedestrian exercise in the dog-days."

"You are amongst the poultry still?"

"Yes."

"Anything up there? calicoes lively?" asks Hugh with delicate *persiflage*.

"Bless your heart, my good fellow, the army's nowhere, they won't look at a soldier! Bulls are the only admirers of scarlet cloth now-a-days!"

Hugh turns to take a last fond look at the pear trees.

"What a sun-trap this garden is!" says Dolly; her *fichu* is not a very efficient turban, and she has a righteous horror of freckles; "let us go home again now that we have found you, you were so long over your gardening that we thought we must come to see what you were about, though

we were not quite sure of our reception, were we?"

"This sort of thing," says Dick, laconically, pointing to a gooseberry bush beside him.

"Exactly, very graphically put." I am too indignant to deny.

"What's very graphically put?" asks Hugh, rejoining me at this moment, but nobody answers him, and we all walk back to the house; *ego et rex meus*, or Hugh and I ahead, and the others following at a little distance.

Sir Hugh's mare, bright bay with white stockings, is being walked up and down the gravelled sweep by Collins, for stablemen have we never a one.

"Poor old girl!" says Hugh, going up and patting her sleek flank, "you're not so young as you were, but no more is your master if it comes to that; but you are as handsome as paint, isn't she?"

"*He* has a very thin tail," say I, and from this remark the amount of my knowledge of horseflesh may be inferred.

The others come up by-and-by, and Dolly exclaims, "Oh, Sir Hugh, you'll

stay luncheon, won't you? It's very shabby of you running away from us in such a hurry."

I stand aghast, with my mouth open, fly-catching.

"No, thanks, no," replies Hugh, rather hastily. He remembers the shin of mutton, and does not agree with the proverb that "the nearer the bone the sweeter the flesh." "I never touch luncheon, at least not once in a month; spoils one's dinner. Good-bye, Miss Lestrange; good-by, Miss Eleanor; see you again soon," (how cheering!) "good-by, M'Gregor, give us a call, old boy, some day, when you are short of a job."

Off he rides, and we three stand looking after him, admiring the set of his coat behind and his mare's rat-tail.

CHAPTER XV.

PROVIDENCE makes use of humble instruments sometimes to fulfil its behests, to prove which many good little books and *leaflets* (as Spurgeon and Co. have christened very young tracts) are written and printed. Providence makes use of Collins now in my favour, for as Sir Hugh and his war-horse—she *is* an old charger—vanish through the upper gate, he mysteriously summons Dolly to receive his confidence on some momentous theme. It was to tell her (as I heard later) that we were out of beer—we mostly were out of most things somehow—and that she may not be led away into offering Major M'Gregor any. *Manent* my follower and I.

"It seems one down t'other come on, with you, Nell," the former says rather bitterly.

"Don't talk about what you don't un-

derstand," I say saucily, my spirits rising like an india-rubber ball; "when people come to call upon a person, the person must be civil to them, mustn't she? *You* come into the garden without being asked, but *other people* aren't so forward."

Dick laughs, but not very satisfiedly.

"Don't remind me of my delinquencies; if I live to be a hundred, I shall never forget your father's face that day. It said 'trespassers shall be prosecuted' as plain as it could speak, didn't it? Well, have you anything particular to do this evening?"

"Have I ever anything to do?"

"Come and meet me then by the brook, by those alders, below the mill, will you?"

We are standing close together, and he lays his hand on my shoulder, in his eagerness, to the amusement of Mary, the housemaid, who, like Jezabel, is "tiring her head" at an upper window. I have not sufficient guile to try and enhance the value of my consent by hesitation, so I say, "Oh yes, how nice; what time?"

"Well, we dine at seven to-day instead of eight; Coxe is going up to town by the

night mail, so I can get away a bit earlier; but I'm afraid it won't be much before half-past eight, that's very late, isn't it? But you know it is daylight till ten now, and then there's the moon."

If there were neither sun, nor moon, nor planet, and only one tallow candle to illuminate our interview, it would not make much difference to me.

"Half-past eight then?"

Dick has only time to execute a nod, pregnant with meaning as Lord Burleigh's, when Dolly reappears.

"I won't ask you to luncheon, Major M'Gregor, as I know it's no use," says Dolly.

How did she know it? There must have been a little confusion of ideas in her mind, I think. She knew it was useless to offer him any beer, because there was none, and I suppose that was what she meant. Dick feels himself dismissed. He has not the *tabouret*, or right of sitting on a stool in Queen Dorothea's presence.

"Why, I rather agree with Lancaster, that it spoils one's dinner; and at Coxe's, dinner's no joke, I can tell you; it re-

quires the powers of an alderman, and would tax even them. Poor Coxe! He means well, and I suppose it is old-fashioned hospitality, but it is rather trying. Good morning."

He fires off a look of intelligence at me, which seems to say, "Remember," as plainly as King Charles the First of blessed memory did to Bishop Juxon. I return it by a minute but knowing nod. I feel rather important, and a little dissipated, with the consciousness of a secret assignation on my mind.

"What was it you and Sandy were laying your heads together about, just now? You appear to 'love greetings in the Market Place.' Collins must have been edified," says Dolly, would-be playfully, but I detect the "clawses at the end of her pawses."

"He was telling me about his passion for Amaryllis, to be sure," reply I, with charming archness; "asking my advice as to Gretna Green and a post-chaise."

"Nonsense! What was it?"

"Brekkekekkex! Koax! Koax!" I answer, quoting Aristophanes, though with-

out knowing it; and Dolly, finding that a servile war has broken out, and that I am in a state of open insurrection, desists.

I was sadly in want of some one to confide in that day. What is the good of possessing the consciousness of being about to do something as exciting, and daring, and *hors de règle* as walking down the Burlington by oneself of an afternoon, unless you have some one to share that proud consciousness with you? What is Tilburina, stark mad in white satin, without her confidant, also stark mad in white linen? I should certainly have unbosomed myself to Mrs. Smith, the recipient of all my confidences, from my aversion for Dolly and Mr. Bowles, to my grief for the death of the little black duck that the rats ate, had it not been that the bread not having "*rose*" (arbitrary past participle of the verb to rise), she was not in the best of humours, and paid small heed to me, when I threw out two or three remarks of an introductory nature as feelers. So I had to content myself with warbling.

"Come into the garden, Maud,"

all over the house, and wondering whether the household did not guess at the personal application of the song. Once and again a qualm of conscience broke off my singing, as I thought of my father. If he were displeased with me for sitting with a young man in our own garden, at *seven* o'clock in the evening (for I really don't believe it was later), would not he, *à fortiori*, be far more displeased with me for sitting with the same young man, at a spot, a quarter of a mile beyond our grounds, at nine o'clock.

My father's notions of propriety were rigidity itself. A woman's virtue in his code of *les convenances*, should be a stiff vestment of buckram and whalebone; he would have liked his daughters' modesty to be inferior only to that of the young lady in "Mr. Midshipman Easy," who affirmed, that to shake hands with a man made a cold shudder run down her back. Shall I not go, then? Stay at home, and mend stockings, and listen to Dolly "damning" her friends "with faint praise," and regaling me with Rochefoucauld and

water. What! and leave poor Dick to kick his heels in the damp grass in dress boots? No, no; if it is a sin to disobey a parent, it is also a sin to break one's word, and when one must commit one of two sins, one may as well choose the pleasantest.

All the same, you will understand, please, that I liked my father a hundred times better than Dick, and always should. I was not, I think, one of those fiery females, whose passions beat their affections out of the field. And really I don't think that Englishwomen are given to flaming, and burning, and melting, and being generally combustible on ordinary occasions, as we are led by one or two novelists to suppose. Foggy England is not peopled with Sapphos.

My thoughts having once travelled to my dad, stayed with him for ever so long. Had he lost any of his pocket-handkerchiefs yet? six of them were not marked. Had he remembered his gout, and abstained from port wine? exchanging the *cuisine* of Lestrange for that of any other house, was, to a human creature, what

being turned into a field of deep clover, after having been regaling on half a dozen bents is to a cow. Is he having a little rest from his burdens, a little time to gather up strength, and fortitude, and endurance? He had told us not to forward his letters to him, and indeed when I looked at their big blue envelopes and the character of their superscriptions, I did not wonder at his not being in any hurry for a better acquaintance with them. I determine to write to him; I don't write a letter once a quarter, so it is a work of some labour.

"Darling Dad,

"It seems such a long time since you went, I can hardly believe that it was only yesterday; I hope you'll come back soon, at least I mean I hope you won't if you find it pleasant where you are. I hope they make a great fuss with you; not so much as I do, I'm sure! Dolly is come back. She looks very well, and has got a whole heap of new clothes; she is about as pleasant as usual. Sir Hugh

Lancaster was here this morning, he came over to talk to you about the dwarf espaliers. (I had to look in the Dictionary to see how *espaliers* spelt itself.) He seemed quite disappointed to find you out, and pronounced the French names almost as badly as you do. Major M'Gregor, the man you did not like, was here too. The cob is very well, and so are all the fowls, except the hen with the top-knot, which has broken her leg tumbling down the ash-hole. I don't think I have anything more to tell you, except that I send you twenty kisses and a great deal of love, and that

"I am always,

"Your most loving NELL."

Tea in the kitchen at Lestrange seems a jovial meal; at least to judge from the peals of laughter that even through the double doors reached our ears now and then. I believe that Collins is humour itself, in unofficial hours, and *Hann* of great worth in repartee. Tea in the dining-room is a silent feast; Dolly is buried in thought, and makes only one remark.

"I think you said that Sir Hugh was at

luncheon here the day before yesterday, didn't you?"

"Yes."

The house seems to fall asleep after tea; as fast as the palace of the sleeping beauty.

"Not a sound,
Not even of a gnat that sung;"

nor could the slumbers of the sleeping beauty herself be sounder than Dolly's as I peep at her through the library door as,

"She lieth on her couch alone."

As the time for my dereliction of duty draws near, I "wash and anoint myself, and change my raiment," or rather, as the fashion of oiling oneself like a machine is not prevalent in these Western regions, I confine myself to the other two. Then I steal through the garden door, and fly through the pleasure grounds, with as much velocity as if I had been projected from a cannon's mouth; *ventre à terre* I go, till I reach the fir wood. Not a breath of air! Every wind from Boreas to Zephyr is asleep in its cave, like bears in winter;

and yet—how they manage it I don't know —there is the same little gentle sighing in the fir tops that there always is; they must do it themselves without the wind, it must be their "song of love and longing," like Shawondasee's to the dandelion in "Hiawatha."

As I cross the threshold of Nature's solemn little pine temple, I drop into a respectful walk, as men take off their hats when they enter a church. On emerging from the wood, coming out of church, I see cavalry in the distance. Courage! I'm not first at the trysting place to-day. I perceive the cavalry before it perceives me, as it is manœuvring among the alders. Is not it humorous of me calling my lover *it;* as humorous as Mr. Peter Magnus signing himself "*Afternoon.*"

I come tripping bashfully over the buttercups and the meadow sweet, which are washing their faces before going to bed, and are so obliging as to wash my ankles too.

"I was afraid Sir Hugh had come to see some more pear trees," says Dick, with

a smile, and drawing a breath of relief as we meet.

I feel a boundless capacity for impertinence unfolding itself within me.

"Yes, indeed, there would not have been much chance for you then; he's a '*baronite*' and you are '*a shade or two wus*,' as you must allow; but fortunately for you, I don't think his dear mamma would let him come out so late at night for fear of getting his feet wet."

"As are yours," says Dick, looking down at my boots, which are all shiny with the dew. "Is he coming to-morrow then?"

"Perhaps so; who knows what luck is in store for one?"

"He seems to bestow a good deal of his company on you; how long is it since he was at Lestrange last?"

"The day before yesterday," reply I readily.

"Humph! cannot understand a fellow making himself so much at home in another man's house; a man might as well keep an inn."

"Who was it?" inquire I, with the air

of a person desirous of information, "who was it that came to call at Lestrange with Mrs. Coxe yesterday, and by himself to-day; have you ever happened to hear of such a person?"

We are walking along slowly side by side, past the alder bushes, further down the brook, where we need not stand in awe of the miller and the milleress's *espionage*. Dick has got a light overcoat over his dress clothes, which are very plain; no embroidered shirt-front, or jewelled studs. Dick is twenty-seven and has passed the jewelled age, which is as regular a period in the history of man, as the wood, the bronze, and the iron, are in geology.

"*I*'m different," says Dick, gravely.

"Are you?" ask I, looking up naïvely. Next minute I am sorry I said it, for I see that he is vexed.

"If *you* don't see it, of course it is not so," he answers coldly, and sticks his nose up in the air, and looks as tall as a steeple.

"I do see it, of course; in the first place you are twice the size of him, he is such a

dear little duodecimo edition of a man, I could rest my chin on the top of his head, with the greatest ease imaginable."

Dick's nose descends from the clouds, and he passes his arm round me, "I'll go down on my marrow-bones before you, and then you can do the same to me; it *is* a nuisance, being such a lumbering great brute, nobody ever gives you a mount."

We have reached a spot where, two months ago, a great girthed oak spread its arms to the air, and its roots to the stream. Where it stood, there it lies now; all along by its friend, the brook, that sings a little pretty dirge for it. We have had to cut down every stick of timber on the property; every stick, except trees as valueless as the hollow elms in the avenue, that are too old even to make paupers' coffins.

"Let us sit down, Nell," says Dick, "I think we may defy the eyes of the mill now, and I don't suppose they've got opera-glasses."

"It's to be hoped not," I say, laughing; "I shall have to run the country if they have," which being interpreted means that

both Major M'Gregor's arms have disposed themselves around me now.

"I never thought I was given to jealousy before — I always thought Othello the biggest fool out," he says, while the honest gray eyes look rather wistfully into mine, and I see myself reflected in the dark pupils; "but I don't know, I don't feel easy about that fellow somehow; why *do* you plague me about him?"

"How should I know it would plague you?" I ask very gaily, "you seemed such very dear friends to-day, 'my dear fellow'ing and old boy'ing' each other, that I thought you would be pleased to hear that he was a dear friend of ours too."

"I knew him in India; all through the Mutiny with him; he is the deadest shot I ever clapped eyes on. They used to get him to pick off those black devils; he bagged a good deal of black game!"

"Were you great friends then, *really?*"

"Oh average! we always hit it off very well; he is a very good straightforward fellow, though he won't set the Thames on fire. He can ride a bit too; and he has

got a modest competence of something under £30,000 a year; *that* covers a multitude of sins."

"I suppose it does; I wonder what it feels like," I say with curiosity.

"Do you know, Nell"—says Dick, and I see his wide white forehead oddly white, when contrasted with the brownness of the rest of his face, contracting a little as with some pain — "do you know, Nell, I have not sixpence to bless myself with, that I am as poor as Job?"

I nod. "Yes; I know!"

"Who told you? Lazarus' reputation precedes him apparently!" (Very sharply).

"Nobody."

"How on earth did you find out then? do I *look* poor? is pauper written on my face?"

I rub my cheek gently against his shoulder.

"I felt sure you were poor; nice people always are! rich men are always short, and old and ugly." (I am thinking of the one Dives of my acquaintance). The sun is dead, but has left half his beauty behind

him; at the mere memory of him, the whole Western sky is a-flame, there are no watery lilac tints streaking the rich crimson that faints away into pale clear gold, and dusky blue. "And at evening ye say it will be fair weather to-day, for the sky is red." The rosy flush is catching at the tops of the churchyard yews; and striking up along the old gray tower like a thought of heaven in a weary life. At our feet, the little burn goes wimpling down to the distant river; a small swift current in the middle, and under the bank little amber pools, where the tiny baby fish can shelter their semi-transparent bodies from the sun. The big ones are swaying their slender bodies 'gainst the stream, which has force to make the "lush green grasses" on its banks bend downwards with it, long and drenched like the hair of a drowned maiden.

"I suppose," says my impecunious Plunger, rather dolefully, looking down and tugging at the ends of his moustache, which are not waxed, "I suppose, if I had done what was right and honourable, I should have sheered off as soon as I

found I was getting hit; but it's an awful grind doing one's duty. If it would but lie in a pleasant direction for a change, it would have more chance of having some attention paid to it; and I really did like you so much, Nell, that, duty or no duty, I had to tell you so. By-the-by, what does your sister think about it?"

"Think about what?"

"About you and me."

"I don't know what she thinks about me, I'm sure; nothing particularly flattering, I fancy. But she thinks that you must be engaged to Amaryllis Coxe; at least, she said so this morning."

"To Amaryllis! God forbid!" says Dick, fervently. "I'd rather a millstone were hanged about my neck, and that I were drowned in the depths of the sea. By-the-by, Amaryllis or *Ammy*, as her sisters tersely call her, is not unlike a millstone either in weight or shape. Your sister put the saddle on the wrong horse that time, didn't she?"

"She was so positive about it, too, that I thought I must have made some mistake. I was beginning to make up my

mind that I must look out for a fresh situation."

"I see. That partly accounts for the pear-trees; a Roland for my Oliver; a Lancaster for my Amaryllis. But seriously, Nell, doesn't she *see* how the land lies? I should have thought that it did not require spectacles."

"There's none so blind as them as won't see," I reply, oracularly.

"And you did not tell her?"

"Not I; I never tell her anything."

Dick looks puzzled.

"That was it, I suppose, then. I thought, of course, that you knew all each other's secrets — my sisters always do." (Dick has not realized the fact that there are sisters and sisters.) "So I began to say something about you to her this morning, and she shut me up rather; did not seem to know what I was driving at, you know; began to talk of something else."

The flush is dying out of the sky's cheek; the remembrance of the dead sun is growing faint as the memory of the human dead weakens beneath the weight

of the crowding years; the buttercups have gone to sleep, each with his little cup full of dew; and the cows are making up for the time they wasted at noon, when they stood knee-deep in the brook, and combated the flies, by feeding now as if for a wager; we hear their short quick bites in the evening stillness; and the stream goes whispering on, carrying little sticks, and green leaves, and fallen cherry blossoms from the mill orchard higher up, as a present to the gray distant sea.

Dick's and my hat are making each other's acquaintance at our feet, and the rising moon is turning our respective red and yellow *chevelures* silver, as the old bugbear with the scythe will do for us by-and-by, if we wait patiently. I don't believe that Dick will ever be an old man. I cannot fancy him with his handsome mouth fallen in, and his handsome eyes melted out; cannot picture him hobbling about in a list shoe, mumbling his dinner with the wrecks of those strong white teeth, and having to be roared at before he can hear what is said to him.

"The sound as of a hidden brook
In the leafy month of June,
That to the sleeping woods all night
Singeth a quiet tune,"

says Dick, in his deep voice. Dick can take a capital bass.

"Do you ever read poetry, Nell?"

"Oh, yes; very often. I have read 'Lara,' and 'We are Seven,' and the 'Lord of Burleigh,' and the 'Needy Knife Grinder,' and 'Samson Agonistes,'" reply I, glibly.

Dick smiles.

"Homer, Plutarch, and Nicodemus,
All standing naked in the open air."

"What has that to say to it?" inquire I, wondering what put that indelicate and irrelevant couplet into his head.

He pinches my cheek.

"Nothing; only I thought that your pieces of poetry seemed to have about as much relationship to one another as those three elderly gentlemen."

"You asked me what I had read, and so I told you," I say, rather injured. "It is not my fault that they are not related to one another, any more than it is

that you are not related to the great Mogul."

"It was very rude of me," apologizing, though the offending smile still lurks. "Tell me something else about your studies, and I'll swear to be as grave as a judge."

"There's nothing to be told about nothing," say I, with chagrin. "Papa knows everything; Dolly knows most things, and I know nothing. That's the state of the case. You thought it fair to tell me that you had no money, and I think it fair to tell you that I have no learning and no brains to get any."

I turn away my head, and the tears, always within hail in my case, come stealing into my eyes.

"I don't believe the last, and I don't care a straw about the first," says Dick, putting his hand under my chin, and bringing my rueful countenance round within reach of his eyes.

"Perhaps—perhaps—" say I, still rather lachrymosely, and making the remark to his shirt-front, on which I have been good enough to deposit my rough, chestnut head,

"perhaps you'll try and teach me something. I asked Dolly once, but she would not."

Dick laughs, and strokes my hair.

"*I?* I can teach you the platoon exercise, and how to make cartridges, and shall be very glad to do either if you think they would help you; but I don't think that my capabilities go much further."

The church clock strikes ten; tells the dead people that they are an hour nearer their release—so clearly and sweetly each beat comes sounding over the quiet land. I resume the possession of my own head, and jump up.

"I must go home, else I shall be locked out."

"There *would* be the devil to pay, then," says Dick, standing up, too, and stretching like a big Newfoundland.

"I shall be late for prayers as it is, and I always read them."

"Oh, you *can* read, can you, ma'am?"

"Yes, I can manage anything under five syllables."

"Why does not Miss Lestrange act

parson? You seem to have no idea of the rights of primogeniture."

"Dolly does not like prayers. She says that they are a great farce, and that she cannot see why, if a person wants to say his prayers, he cannot say them to himself, without dragging in all the household to help him."

"They'll have a holiday from family worship at Lestrange to-night, then, I take it."

"Yes, sure to. Well," (with a long sigh) "it has been very pleasant. Good night."

"I'm willing to bid you good night any number of times, but if you think you are going to get rid of me here, you are mistaken. It's Lancaster's turn now. How do I know that he may not be dodging round the corner somewhere?"

So we stroll away together from the silvered sedges, and the poor barked tree, and the spot where we have been doing our best to lay in a stock of rheumatism, and swelled joints, and shooting pains for our riper years, the pennilessest, improvidentest, happiest pair of sweethearts in

Great Britain. Walk as slow as we may, and no tortoise can beat us, ten minutes bring us to the parting gate. There we pose ourselves in the attitude of the famous "Huguenot" picture.

"I don't think you can come to much grief, Nell, between this and the Hall door. Good night, my darling. You are *my* darling, and not Lancaster's, aren't you? God in Heaven bless you!"

"*Yours*, if you'll have me; if not, *nobody's*," I say, very earnestly; and then we kiss each other twenty times, where we first kissed, beneath the big white lilac bush.

CHAPTER XVI.

A HOUSEHOLD where woman reigns alone, freed from the dominion of her natural enemy; an entirely female establishment, leavened by no admixture of the masculine element, is a very dreary thing. So I found to my cost during that long, long week.

The man of a family may be, and often is, a very inferior animal to his womankind; made of infinitely poorer, commoner clay; he may be a coarse, surly brute, all body and no soul worth speaking of, or a soul wrapped up and enfolded in swine and turnips, or in gray shirting, or brown sugars, or pill-boxes and blisters. Even so, the sound of his heavy boots on the stairs, of his gruff, untuneful voice, mixes harmoniously and healthily with the women's noiseless, cat-like footfalls and shrill treble pipes. Good is his unbeautiful face

at dinner; good are his dull anecdotes, that yet bring a whiff of the outer world with them; yea, good are his very hat and dreadnought in the hall.

Women's minds are apt to get narrowed, soured (the best women's have an undeveloped tendency that way), if they have not some male intellect to rub against, and be wholesomely jostled and buffeted and sweetened by.

How dumb the old house seemed that week! I don't think Sir Adrian, Sir Guy, and Sir Fulke, can be much dumber as they "lie in glory" under the chancel of Lestrange Church. Outside, the thrushes and blackbirds sang, the cocks crowed, the dogs barked, the ploughboys whistled, and I caught myself wishing earnestly that they would all come indoors, and make their pleasant noises in the hall, in the ghostly galleries, in any room or rooms they pleased, just to break the weary silence, the silence as of a house where a shrouded body lies coffined, a tenantless rigid clay image. Dolly sat through the long hours, motionless as a statue, tinted with life colours, like Vishnoo contem-

plating his own attributes and god gifts in the shining heart of the Swerga.

My fingers itched sometimes with a profane longing to box her ears, to upset her out of her chair, to do anything unseemly, just to shake her out of her frozen content with herself and that endless gray stocking, which was of dimensions suited to a manly leg, and yet not destined, as I knew, for our papa's wear.

"Satan finds some mischief still, for idle hands to do,"

is about the most veracious couplet ever indited by Mr. Watts of busy beeical memory. Even if he leaves our hands unprovided with work of his; leaves them to hang down harmless by our sides, or folded in our laps, he makes up for his forbearance by giving our minds double tasks.

How rigidly must those early Eremites, those holy men who loved their souls so much, and soap and water so little—how rigidly, I say, must they have adhered to their Lenten fare; upon how few bitter herbs, upon what undiluted water must they have dieted themselves, if they did

really succeed in keeping all earthly imaginings away from those lichen-curtained rock crevices where they were wont to stow their lean tormented bodies out of harm's way. To lock the door against those ideas, "earthly, sensual, devilish," that throng the portals of an empty soul, must have been even a harder job than the exclusion of the lizards, newts, and other "miscreated forms of life" that frequented those dank, agueish abodes.

My mind misgives me concerning those bearded, ragged, vermined saints, that their bald-shaven pates enclosed thoughts as naughtily mundane, and as mundanely naughty as any of their helmeted and wigged coevals; that that hair cloth (stranger to the washing tub) covered hearts that beat to as worldly a tune as any devil's jig. Man's spirit is so essentially irreligious, so honestly God-hating, that, leave it to itself for one minute, it turns its back upon its Maker; runs away from Him swifter than a jagged lightning flash, "anywhere, anywhere."

Montaigne counsels an infrequent use of prayer, because, saith that chatty old

heathen, man's soul is so rarely in a suitable attitude for addressing its Creator. The premises are right, though the conclusion is wrong. What do we see in the depths of our tall hats when we gaze so devoutly into them in church? When we lean back with folded arms in our corner of the family pew, while the parson is

"Bummin away like a buzzard clock ower our heads,"

are we thinking of Heaven's high King, and our position relatively to him; or is not rather our fancy running riot among our pleasant sins? We call them to us, one by one; we look into their dear faces, and give them a parting hug, whilst God's messenger is giving his parting warning or promise to us. These remarks are somewhat out of place here; but they would do nicely for the backbone of a sermon when I have leisure to compose one. It may be objected by some one that the pleasant sins of an innocent-minded girl of nineteen must be few and far between; that I (such as I have described myself) could barely have had

enough iniquities to meditate upon, to fill up many of those vacant hours.

Iniquities, perhaps not! sins, perhaps not, according to the lax worldly interpretations of the term; but of silly, witless, profitless conceptions and whims I had great store. There seemed to be nothing but feeding times to look forward to that week; from breakfast to dinner, from dinner to tea, we travelled sluggishly, with no emotion livelier than what the sight of minced collops or hasty pudding was calculated to call forth.

If one of the chimneys would but catch fire; if that unsafe garret where the man hanged himself in Queen Anne's days, would but fall in; if even one of the dogs would but have a fit, or puppies, or anything; if *anything* would but happen! thought I. Something *must* happen before long; even if I myself had to pull the strings that set the machinery in motion. I began to have a morbid longing to do something startling, something that would break the gelid monotony of my existence. In my pretty vacant head—I can talk of its prettiness now without airs

of mock modesty; now, I say, when it is as much a thing of the past as Helen's or Aspasia's — I began to cast about what action at once extremely eccentric and extremely naughty I could perform.

Should I slay Dolly in some new and ingenious manner? should I practise some picturesque form of suicide? should I drown myself in the garden pool, and be found with my long red hair inextricably entangled among the duckweed? or should I choose some sequestered spot in which to "snip my carotid," and be discovered beautiful but gory, with an explanatory billet in my lily hand?

I was saved from the difficulties attendant upon the selection of either of these enticing endings by the occurrence of two small incidents which diverted my plannings and imaginings into other channels. The first incident regarded the butcher; the second, Sir Hugh Lancaster and "that other." The butcher may be dismissed *paucis verbis*. He came, he saw, whether he conquered or was conquered I am not very clear.

One morning I stood by the garden

pool, looking down rather ruefully at the duckweed, and hoping that it would not get up my eyes and nose and ears when I should commit myself to its shining breast in despairing yet becoming self-slaughter, Dick having proved faithless, or having been killed in the wars. What wars, whether French, Kaffre, or Sikh, I had not decided; there being, at the time I write of, an equally remote probability of our picking a quarrel with either of those nations. Among onion beds and cabbages, and through the well-sticked peas came Mrs. Smith in panting haste, and with woe in her eye.

"Oh, my dear, Miss Nelly, the *butcher!*" As the war-horse is popularly supposed to snort at the trumpet blare, so snorted I at that fear-breeding name. "I've spent all the breath in my body trying to make him let it stand over till next week; them pigs oughter bring your pa in some money then; but he won't hear till it, he's in the room now (ellipse for housekeeper's room) stormin' shameful that he is!" I picked up a stone and flopped it into the pond, making a hole

in the duckweed. "I've been to Miss Dolly, and tried to get her to go down to him; she's such a rare good'un to palaver folks, she is! I thought she might make somethin' of 'im, but she did not seem to care nothin' about it. She said if he threaped the roof of the 'ouse off, it wasn't none of her business." I fished for a floating piece of becka bunga with a stick, coveting its small blue star flowers. "'Put not your trust in princes,'" said I, gravely, "that is in Miss Dolly, who, if she isn't a princess, ought to be one."

"If I'd a known," said Mrs. Smith, expanding her fat hands to catch the pond breezes, "all I should ha' 'ad to put up with, along o' that man I'd a seen him eating snails at Jericho, with a two pronged fork, afore I'd 'a let 'im inside our doors; they're the independentest lot about 'ere as ever I see, *that* they are; there aint no doin' no good with them, nohow."

I let pass, without criticism, the redundancy of negatives in my house-keeper's last clause. I was still immersed in hooking up wet lengths of water-weed.

"And what the *jouse*," (sic) perorated Mrs. Smith, rising into sublimity, as she stretched a drab stuff arm to Heaven, "I am to say to that ould *blaygaird*, I know no more than the babe unborn."

My piscatory efforts were by this time crowned with success. I had tugged up great sprays of greenery, and now grasped them lovingly in my bare white hands, while they dripped abundantly over my dress.

"Pretty things," said I, invoking them inwardly, "are my eyes as blue as you, I wonder? I must ask Dick." Then aloud. "*I* know what to say to him, Mrs. Smith, though you and the unborn babe don't; and what's more, I *will* say it before I'm ten minutes older." Whereupon I left the pond, and the becka bunga, and the potherbs, and ascended lightly to the upper chamber, where I kept unrevealed to Dolly, to Mrs. Smith, or other living soul, poor Dick's bank-notes. Armed with them, and with his bill, I repaired to the encounter with the "fat greasy kill-cow," as Southey christens one of that fraternity. I entered the

"room," as Mrs. Smith called it — the room, *par excellence*—with my head up and my nose in the air. Oh for those fine old days when the fowls of the air built their nests in Justice's disused scales, when the Sieur Lestrange might take twenty lances and transfer as many fat kine as seemed good in his mind's eye, from his low-born neighbours' premises to his own.

Happy, happy days, when gentlefolks lived at ease and duns were not. So, in I stalked, with my chin superciliously elevated, and my money in my sack's mouth. There he sat, the vile *roturier*, red-faced, vituperative, with a glass of beer beside him, which Mrs. Smith had given him as a peace offering. There he sat swilling our beer (that smallest, sourest of all malt liquors), and reviling us.

"I believe you want your bill paid," I said, haughtily, while Mrs. Smith gave my gown a great jerk of dismay at my lofty deportment, from behind.

"I *rayther* believe I do, miss," responded my creditor. "I've been a wantin', and a wantin', and a wantin' it

any time this last twelve munse, but it don't seem much good a wantin' hanything in this 'ouse."

I tossed down his bill and four of my bank notes with it.

"Give me change, please," said I superbly, "and be quick about it."

As I spoke, I think a feather might have floored the great man-mountain before me. Two round eyes, stolid, unspeculative as his own oxen's, stared even rounder and rounder at me; he did not move hand or foot.

"Be quick, please," I said again, very imperiously, and gave a little stamp. He escaped apoplexy by a near shave that time; after all, there was the money, and that was all that was his business, "though *sewerly* it was odd how them Lestranges managed to get hould on it." So he thrust a hand as big as a fillet of veal into his pocket, and counted out the change, and then, calling for a pen, scratched his receipt.

"Now," said I, with my eyes flashing in my triumph, and the Lestrange blood burning in my fair cheeks, "leave the

house this instant," and I waved my hand towards the door, "and never set foot in these doors again, do you hear? Go, this minute."

He was cramming his bill and his notes into his breeches pocket; then he prepared to obey me.

"I'm agoin', miss," said he, grinning; "don't you be aputtin' of yourself about; and I do hope as you'll find some one as 'ull serve you satisfactory, and bring you all the best *jints*, and not expect to get a farden for them neither, that I do. Good-day to you, miss."

He was a low fellow, wasn't he? but I'm not sure that he had not the best of the argument.

CHAPTER XVII.

Few, indeed, were those of the families dwelling round Lestrange that had not contributed a combatant to the siege of Sir Hugh Lancaster. Lestrange itself was no exception to the general rule; we had sent forth our eldest hope, or rather she had sent herself forth to the fray, and, after a protracted campaign, had returned to us, worsted, indeed, but in good order. She had never fought in the foremost ranks, nor had she ever been amongst the leaders of the Crusades, being too wary for that; but for all that she had laid lines of circumvallation, had set up battering rams, and pointed cannon as sedulously as the noisiest, vapouringest of her rivals.

But the lines had been laid so stealthily, the battering rams brought up so quietly, and the cannon pointed so noiselessly, that when she returned discomfited, having

been compelled to raise the siege, none knew the fact, none knew that there had been a siege at all, except the besieged town itself, and one that viewed the carnage from afar, to wit, myself.

Dolly, unlike the bulk of her nation, knew when she was beaten; once thoroughly foiled, she never renewed the attack; whether by escalading, mining, or any other mode, she kept her scaling-ladders for walls more accessible; she laid up her javelins and cannon balls to hurl against iller-defended ramparts.

In Sir Hugh, I think, must have been lacking some one of the ingredients that go to compose a man; he was the sole individual of his species that ever I met with who appeared totally impervious to the beseechments of those maddening eyes that ordinarily upset the manly reason from its throne, and made the manly head giddy and staggering, as with strongest new wine. He did not appear even to see them.

Dolly was very civil to him after those days, and cooed pretty little speeches to him when they met, but she never missed

an opportunity of giving him a sly little stab behind his honest back, and she "hated" him with the hate of "hell."

Had Sir Hugh and Dolly been cast upon some desert island, it is my belief that each would have kept to their separate half, each have had their own banyan trees, and fountains, and caves; they might perhaps have exchanged nuts and roots, and other savage delicacies, but their intercourse would have been confined to that till some night, when the tropic moon was bathing in the plunging tropic waves, Dolly would have stolen to Sir Hugh as he slept under the feathery palm trees, and have cut his throat with a sharpened stone, or strangled him with her strong white fingers; she would then have taken off his handsome signet-ring and his hunting-watch, thinking it a pity that they should be wasted; would have buried him neatly in the shelly sand, that he might not infect the torrid air, and would then have sat down and watched "the sunrise broken into scarlet shafts," with calmly waiting eyes.

That dreary week came to an end, and

still papa made no sign of an intention of returning to his leathern arm-chair, and his handsome daughters, and his duns. One morning, Dolly and I sat as usual at our *tête-à-tête* breakfast. Most refreshing was she to look upon, as she sat there calmly munching her bread and butter, the sleep not yet quite gone out of her heavenly eyes. Her hair was all swept back, tidily and comfortably out of her way, behind those ravishing little ears, and gathered up into a delicious ingenious sort of twist behind, the mysteries of which no manly mind could pretend to fathom. Her dress, simple enough, was of some thin, cool summer stuff, of a rich, bright Forget-me-not blue, aud round her dear little white throat hung a gold locket, in which lurked the photograph of the latest victim. She turned over her unopened despatches with slight leisurely fingers, and made comments on their exteriors before opening them.

"A bill," she said to the first, tossing it away. "Another from that stupid boy! what a bore! I thall have the bother of writing to him again; and No. 2 was passed

carelessly by. "Lady Lancaster's hand, I declare!" The bread and butter is dropped, the envelope is torn open, and Dolly becomes immersed in the contents. I likewise have a letter—a letter written in a big bold hand, with a very broad-nibbed quill pen, and about two words, or one long one, in a line. Thus it ran—

"My Darling,—My leave will be up on Friday; I have tried to get extension, and failed. They're up to the 'urgent private affair' dodge now, so go I must, I suppose. Will your father be home before then? I want very much to have a talk with him, on what subject I think you'll guess. Write to me one little line, my pretty one, and say something kind, for I'm awfully low at the thought of going.

"Your very fond

"R. H. M'Gregor."

Before opening this document, I had had a very good appetite, and had surveyed the viands with a hungry eye; now I felt that one mouthful would choke me. My hands were trembling, and my cheek flush-

ing when Dolly's calm voice wafted these few words to my ear, "Do you wish to read this?" she held out Lady Lancaster's note, inscribed with niggling little characters, and headed with a monster monogram, in which half the letters of the alphabet twisted their legs and bent their backs against each other.

"Dear Miss Lestrange,—My son tells me that you and your sister are quite alone at Lestrange. Will you come to us to-morrow for three days, as we have a few friends coming to us? Please excuse such a short notice, as I did not know you had returned before.

"Yours sincerely,

"A. J. K. N. LANCASTER."

"P.S.—Major M'Gregor, who I think you know, is to be among our party."

Lady Lancaster's characters were of the crabbedest, "scribbled, crost, and crammed," "hard to mind and eye," as Merlin's charm; any word might have been any other word: "friends" looked like "fiends," "house" like "louse," "quite"

like "guts," and "days" like "dogs." However, I mastered the gist with great rapidity, and left the minor difficulties for after-consideration.'

"Shall we go, Dolly?" asked I, and I covered my mouth with my hand, to hide the broad smiles that would come rippling, dimpling over it. *Hei mihi!* What a capacity for pleasure feeling one has in one's green youth! To feel either pleasure or pain is a sign of weakness; if we could ward off things noxious, hateful to us; if we could procure at will things profitable, jocund, we should never experience either sensation, but rest in a calm, immovable nothingness.

> "I joy because the quails come; would not joy
> Could I bring quails at will,"

or something to that effect, says Browning's Caliban. Our sources of enjoyment grow fewer, and dwindle at every fresh section of our lives.

In childhood we enjoy everything, from the devouring of uncleanly compounded lollipops upwards, everything except being washed and saying our prayers. In youth

we enjoy most things; the screws and springs of our earthly machine are in such prime order; the wheels of that chariot that will drive so heavily by-and-by, run so smoothly and glibly, that we think they must needs be running to some pleasant goal, as they are in such a hurry to get over the ground to it. In manhood we enjoy many things, though each year knocks off one or two from the shortening list. In old age we enjoy few; the wheelless, springless waggon lumbers toilfully along a rutty road, and in death—nay, in death, I know not what we do, nor what we leave undone—yea, I know nothing concerning it.

My hand is on the thick black curtain, whose warp is darkness, and whose woof is grief; when next the hedges, burgeoning now, are putting forth their sprouting green, I shall have raised the curtain, and have found out what there is behind it. But, oh, my friends, I cannot come back to tell you; if I shriek with agony, if I laugh with rapture at what I find there, you will not hear me.

"Shall we go, Dolly?" said I.

"I don't know what *you*'ll do, I'm sure; *I* shall go."

"There's no reason why I should not go too, is there, Dolly?" I went over and knelt down by my sister, and put up my small white face to be kissed. I was so happy that I loved everybody, even Dolly (with a spurious sort of affection, it is true). Dolly stooped a reluctant pink velvet cheek towards mine; she looked upon two women's kissing one another as a misapplication of one of God's best gifts.

"No reason whatever," said she, with cold cheerfulness, "except that you have nothing but rags to go in."

I rose hastily from my knees, with my desire for osculation quite quenched.

"All the better for you," said I, a little bitterly; "I shall make a better foil than ever."

"I'm quite satisfied with you as you are," Dolly said; and with this parting shaft she withdrew.

Twelve hours more, and I am transferred from the ancient domicile where the rats and we hold a divided sway to the substantially hideous brickdust coloured pile,

where Hugh Lancaster and his household gods dwelt with his mamma, well content.

Two aged coach-horses (whereof one was spavined and the other had spring-halt, and both were overfull of grass), yoked to our triumphal car, *i.e.*, a dilapidated yellow-bodied barouche, hung high in air, in which papa and mamma had taken their wedding tour, bore my sister and myself to Wentworth Park. It is ten o'clock, and the brave and the fair are all assembled in the yellow drawing-room. There are a good many people, but not a great many.

The gentlemen have just torn themselves from Sir Hugh's '47 port, and are huddling, most of them, about the door, black-backed, white-throated, with the Briton's inborn grace in each of their attitudes. The ladies, in blue and pink and purple, and fine twined linen, and with many natural productions in the shape of flowers and butterflies and feathers, and beetles about their heads, are dotted about the yellow satin. The yellow satin is Lady Lancaster's very own taste; she matched it by her cheeks,

and then lavished it on sofas and ottomans and chairs. It makes most people look hideous by night and jaundiced by day.

Let me give a short descriptive list of the company among whom I find my lot for the present cast: Sir Hugh, in broadcloth and high good humour; his mother in wrinkles and Point d'Alençon; a thin viscount with a handsome wife, who bore a year of her lord's income on her fat back; a man in barnacles, supposed to be a genius, because he never spoke and had one or two nasty tricks; a puisne judge, who to his acquaintance's exceeding dolour, was very much up in political economy; a tall young man, who had a bad cold; and a short one, who wore death's-head studs and made jokes; an agreeable old gentleman, who did not believe in anything particular, and had a certain proclivity towards *double entendres;* a young lady, with sharp shoulder blades, and another with a sharp tongue; a widow with a great many bugles about her, who rather relished the agreeable old gentleman's innuendoes; a big fair man of the name of M'Gregor, and two

artless virgins of the name of Lestrange. The judge has got the cheerful old sceptic into a corner, and is inflicting a new form of the question on him.

"We must ameliorate the condition of the rural poor, my dear sir, that's what we must do," he is saying, very confidentially, as if he was telling some pleasant secret. "We must set sanitary reforms on foot throughout the country; that's what I have always been saying. I can tell you" (lowering his voice) "that the utter neglect of sewage in many of the agricultural districts would surprise you, it would indeed."

"Yes, yes, I dare say, no doubt," replies the unhappy heathen, uneasily, edging away from his captor, and looking as if he did not much care whether there was one sewer throughout the length and breadth of Britain or no. He has got a succulent anecdote which he is panting to pour into the widow's rosy ears.

"I bet a dabesake of yours the other day," quoth the man with the catarrh to the man with the skulls, "he was a cordet

in the dideth; they had some dickdabe for hib; the *Dose*, I think it was."

"The *what?*"

"The *dose*, because he had such a big dose, you dow," touching his own afflicted feature, explanatorily.

"What a cold that poor man has got!" says the viscountess, with fat compassion.

"Does not he wish he was in bed, poor wretch?" says the sharp young lady, pertly. The shoulder-blades agitates her fan softly, and sighs behind it.

"Aren't you tired of standing?" breathes Dolly, low as the south wind when it blows the down from the clematis, to a large and stately person who is leaning over her.

"Is that a hint for me to go?" responds the large person, making no movement, however, towards so doing.

My sister says, "Oh, no!" semi-audibly; and the thick, white lids sweep down over the modest eyes. Dolly is sitting on a prie-dieu, right under the big, hundred-lighted chandelier, and the waxlights are blazing down full on her shimmery sheeny garments, on her round pearl-white shoulders, and on the coral lengths that go

twisting in and out of her blue black hair. Dolly is doing no harm at all, none whatever; only she is looking up under her eyes in a way I know, a way I cannot do myself, and that I hate.

Dick rests his arms on the back of the prie-dieu, which is diverted from its original use this evening; he looks very handsome and a good deal out of sorts; his yellow moustache droops close to her ear, as he talks low and rapidly to her, occasionally looking up to scowl at me.

For myself, I am in a position which I would willingly cede to any one else in the room, should they propose an exchange. I am seated on a sofa (yellow, of course), by Sir Hugh, and we have a picture-book on our laps (half on mine and half on his), and he *will* keep his head very close to mine, pull away as I will; and the consequence is, we have, to a casual observer, a very lover-like and *flirtatious* air.

Over against me, is a big mirror, in it I catch occasional glimpses of myself. I see a little head "brow-bound with" the "burning gold" of its own ruddy locks. I see great blue eyes that look childish

and troubled, and about to cry, and I see a good sized but withal pretty mouth quivering distressedly. We are looking at prints from Landseer.

"Jolly kind of dog that," says Sir Hugh, "aint it? had one just like it myself once, only mine had more tan about the muzzle; best sporting dog I ever had. Came to awful grief, poor brute, though, got caught in a trap and had to be shot. I never was so cut up about anything, I don't think."

"Perhaps so," I murmur, with utter irrelevancy.

"Perhaps what?" cries Sir Hugh at sea.

"Did I say perhaps anything—oh, so I did. I—I don't think I quite understood what you were saying. Truth to tell, I am straining my ears to catch Dolly's remarks. My ears do not look very long ones, but they are long of hearing"

"Does not Nelly look nice to-night?" She was sighing in her honeyed way. "What would not one give for that freshness of sensation? We old people have *effleuré* all our pleasures, haven't we?"

Dick's answer is addressed to the back of her head, so I lose it.

"Half child and half woman? Ye—es, I think so, combining the amusements of both ages too, isn't she, lover and picture-book?"

Dick bit his golden moustache, and his gray eyes flashed angrily.

"She must be mighty easy pleased, if Lancaster's conversation can afford her *amusement*."

"Oh, I don't know; she's young, and —well, perhaps—but indeed Major M'Gregor, I think that facility of being pleased and attracted is a very enviable possession. If one had it, one would never feel lonely in society, as one sometimes does now, doesn't one?"

One swift satanic shot from the dark, passionate, sympathy-craving eyes; a shot that reached his senses, I think, though it missed his heart.

"Do you sig, Biss Seybour?" asks the cold in the head of the shoulder blades.

"Sometimes—to intimate friends—now and then; do you?"

"Do; but I'be very fod of it. Do you dow a sog called 'Baggie's Secret?'"

Miss Seymour bites her fan in perplexity.

"'Baggie's Secret?' No—o, I think not; who's it by? Oh, '*Maggie's* Secret,' to be sure; how stupid of me!"

Miss Seymour does know it, loves it, and will sing it if he wishes. My Hugh and I have reached the last of our dog portraits.

"H'm! come to an end, have they?" says Hugh, trying to split the last leaf in two with his broad thumb. "Never mind, there's lots more somewhere."

He rises to seek more pabulum for my mind and eyes, and I stretched out an eagerly detaining hand.

"Oh, *please,* won't it do another time? I think I've seen almost enough pictures. I'm —I'm a little tired."

The worthy baronet regarded me with surprise plainly written on his broad brown face.

"Tired! nonsense! are you? Have some sherry and soda? Mother, here's Miss Lestrange so knocked up she can

hardly move; what are we to do with her?"

Lady Lancaster and the Point d'Alençon happily do not hear; are rather hard of hearing indeed.

"Oh, don't, don't, please! it's nothing, only the room is a little hot; isn't it?" cry I, panting.

"Ah, yes; so it is, now you mention it; quite like an oven; I never can get mother to have the windows open; come into the next room, it's much cooler there, and we shall have it all to ourselves."

What an inducement! thought I. The waxlights blaze steadily oppressive; the singing girl's voice comes harshly to my ear; the yellow satin glare tires my aching eyes, and across blaze and glare I see a Greek face, a very cross Greek face, scowling prohibition at me. Oh, why is he scowling at me? what have I done? what can I do? "We shall have it all to ourselves," repeats honest Sir Hugh, with his jolly voice not a note lowered. The heathen escaped from his corner, is getting to the point of his spiced tale; its

cayenne is tickling the widow's palate; she is chuckling behind her black-edged pocket-handkerchief. The air is faint with patchouli and ess bouquet, and heavy scented gardenias.

I feel a hysterical lump rising in my throat, and the angry Greek face is clouding before my eyes. I am going to cry! I am going to make a scene! I am going to make a fool of myself! I rise hastily; and, upsetting a light cane chair, and two Chinese gods in my passage, pass hurriedly down the room, through the folding doors into the cool empty saloon beyond, while Hugh, sore amazed at my indecent haste, follows hard upon my heels. Dolly's voice, pseudo-compassionate, pseudo-motherly, pursuing, stings me. "Poor Nell! that *empressé* manner is very pretty, isn't it?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

"LIVE as long as you may," says Southey, "the first twenty years are the longest half of your life." It is a reflection so trite, as to be made by every living soul capable of that mental process ycleped thought, that one of childhood's days is equal in duration to five or six of man or womanhood's; that one of childhood's years is a Sæculum, a mighty Æon, whereof the beginning is more distant from the ending than are the Tudor days from ours. Was the case the same, I marvel, with those giants in age that flourished and withered before the Flood?

Those unfortunates, on whom was inflicted the penance of a thousand years of labour and sorrow, did their earlier days spread and stretch themselves in the same disproportionate fashion? Did they grow

to maturity, I wonder, as soon as we do? Were they full grown at twenty, middle-aged at fifty; and were their remaining eight or nine hundred winters devoted to old age? Oh, monstrous notion! A land peopled with dotards! a world full of gray heads and gouty feet, and age-palsied intellects. The alternative, though more probable, is *assez drôle*, in its necessary and legitimate consequences.

At a hundred years old, those ill-starred ones were still spinning tops and dressing dolls, if antediluvian dolls there were; at two or three hundred, they were making love, and getting into those scrapes to which hot-headed youth is liable; at five hundred, they were thinking of settling down to the serious business of their lives. Were the memories of those ancients strengthened in proportion to the length of time they had to be exercised upon?

Did they remember in their eighth or ninth century, what they said and did in their first and second, or were they in their later days oblivious of the actions and passions of their youth? Could a man in King George's reign have any very distinct re-

collection of what he was thinking about in King Alfred's?

"I know not; what avails to know."

I have heard it affirmed by sane people, and have read in divers books, that breakfast forms the cheerfulest, socialest réunion of English home life. Whosoever stated that fact, whosoever wrote it, I take upon myself to deny it. *Tout au contraire;* that interesting animal, man, so curious in many of his habits, is at that hour at his worst. A remnant of sleepiness, unknown to themselves, clings to most people; they have not warmed to their day's work. If the new organizing of society were intrusted to me, I should make it as indecorous to breakfast in public, as it is now considered to perform one's ablutions in the presence of that vague personage, the world.

Whether social or not, breakfast is over at Wentworth; much kippered salmon and cold tongue have been consumed, and a little slack conversation has been kept up. Dolly, knowing that there is a time for all things, has molested no man with her eyes,

has contented herself, at least, with two or three quite trifling glances at Dick, whom Fate had deposited at her side. Breakfast then is over, has been over an hour or more, and most of the tenants of that red brick Elysium, Wentworth Park, are standing and sitting about the hall, pulling on gloves, reading the *Times*, and settling disputed claims to pot hats.

Before the door, out in the spring sunshine, stand many horses, *malely* and femalely saddled; likewise a double dogcart with a pair of light-hearted chestnuts. Most of the ladies are in riding-habits; the widow among the number, and very like an overripe gooseberry she looks. I am unclad in riding gear; I have never bestridden (or the feminine equivalent for bestridden) anything nobler than a jackass; never shall possibly. It is evident we are all on the verge of some expedition. Most of us, it is true, would rather stay at home; to many of us, indeed, a pic-nic is verily and indeed the accursed thing.

Two or three of the men are yearning to throw a fly in the trout stream, that goes

purling, twisting, flashing through Sir Hugh's fat meadows—

"Thro' the meads where melick groweth."

Two or three more would far fainer be a peppering of rooks, and a ratting with pink-eyed terriers than squiring of dames along a dusty road. No matter. The trout, speckled, pink-fleshed, silvery, may, jumping, gulp down live flies in peace to-day. No fictitious fly framed of delicatest feather, and finest silk, will this day beguile them.

We are to be amused, all of us, *nolentes volentes*, not in our own way but in Lady Lancaster's. I am among the very few *volentes*. I am not looking my best this morning, having been crying most of the night, and there is a red rim round each eye; but of red rims, red noses, and haggard cheeks, I am careless, for I am sitting on the topmost one of the flight of stone-steps that lead up to the hall door.

Dick is stretching his long length, like a big Newfoundland, one step below me; he is looking at the chestnuts, and smiling and saying:—"Won't we put them along

at a tidy pace, Nell? We'll take the shine out of them?"

By one brilliant *coup*, I have retrieved last night's disasters; at least I think so.

Five minutes back, Dick was leaning against the door-post, looking glummer than glum. Nobody was nigh save me. Dolly was upstairs, Sir Hugh was rating one of his grooms. What an opportunity for prompt action. I go up and put my hand on his arm. "Dick," said I (I had never called him Dick before), "Well?" (very glum), "What have I done? why are you angry with me?"

"I am not angry," (with averted head, but slightly thawed intonation).

"If you're not angry, do drive me in the dogcart to-day, instead of riding; you know I cannot ride; *do*, *dear* Dick!"

As I make this indecently forward proposal, my voice shakes, and my heart thumps like a steam ram. Dick's head veers round like a weathercock in a high wind.

"Won't I just? if I have the chance; what a little darling you are! but you see

the cart is Lancaster's—not mine, and perhaps—"

Sir Hugh coming up, interrupts him.

"You're for riding, I suppose, ain't you, M'Gregor? Carriage exercise isn't much in your line; at least it used not to be, and there's the roan all ready for you."

"Oh, thanks, old fellow," responds M'Gregor, "but if you don't mind, I've rather a fancy for tooling these chestnuts along. I don't seem to care much about peacocking along the king's highroad."

Sir Hugh's countenance falls.

"All right," says he (his face says "all wrong"), "just as you like, only you'd better keep an eye on that off mare; she is the very devil to pull when there's anything behind her; don't blame me, Miss Lestrange, if you find her flourishing her heels in your face."

Dolly standing near, overheard. She was holding her habit up delicately with one hand, and slashing a small Balmoral boot with her whip.

"Had not you better get your cloak, Nell?" she suggested, "we may be late coming home."

"Perhaps I had," said I, and up-stairs I ran, two steps at a time. Dolly followed me, made a remark or two upon my dress, and upon no other subject, and then went down again. I was a long time finding my cloak; having discovered it at last in the depths of a trunk, I redescended to the hall. Dolly is gone; the riders all are gone, but the dogcart is still there; Sir Hugh is still there, and Richard is not there! I stare blankly.

"Why I thought Major M'Gregor was to drive me?"

Sir Hugh's mirth runs over in laughing eyes and a broad grin.

"Yes, so he was, but your sister made it all right; awfully jolly of her, wasn't it?"

"How—how do you mean?" I gasp.

"Why she told him you were rather nervous about horses, and that you were rather alarmed at what I said about the mare; that was all my eye, you know. She's as quiet as an old cow."

"Well, go on," said I, digging my teeth into my under-lip.

"Well, he stuck to it like a man for a

long time, till at last she had to tell him—jolly girl she is—that you had hinted to her—she said you did not like to speak out—that you'd rather have me for a Jehu; he gave in, then, in a minute, like a sensible fellow. Come, hadn't we better be starting! Mind the wheel?"

My heart, like Nabal's, turns to stone within me. I get in, mechanically.

"Give her her head," shouts Sir Hugh to the groom, and off we go. The chestnuts are a showy, high-actioned pair, and step well together; full of oats are they; swiftly do they bear us along.

> "We by parks and lodges going,
> See the lordly castles stand,
> Summer woods about us blowing
> Made a murmur in the land."

Only we did not see any "lordly castles," beeause there were not any such on the Lancaster estate. Instead we passed by many a substantial farm and homestead, with barns and stacks, and trim out-buildings, that told of a good and a well-to-do landlord. Hugh points out his possessions with complacency as we bowl past them.

"D'ye see that copse over there, with the lot of scrubby brushwood there, down in the hollow?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's the very best cover in the county; always find there; never missed once last season."

"Oh."

I am determinedly sulky, and register an inward vow that no sentence longer than a monosyllable shall be extracted from me. The hedges are white with hawthorn; on the orchards the rosy snow of the apple blooms lies thick, the blackbirds are singing, and Sir Hugh's heart is merry within him.

"Nice little box that, isn't it?" says he presently, indicating with his whip a snug cottage, buried in cherry trees and laburnums. "My governor built it for an old bailiff of his. I've got a lot of greyhounds there now for coursing."

No comment whatever.

"Do you like coursing?"

"No."

Our destination is a certain show place, fourteen or fifteen miles from Wentworth,

a place that appertains to a certain earl, who has so many houses, show and not show, that he is quite puzzled to know which to live in. The equestrians reach the bourne to which all we travellers are hastening sooner than my Hugh and I do; they are able to take advantage of bridle paths and wood paths and narrow lanes, in which, if we attempted to traverse them, we and our four-wheeled vehicle should stick. So our delicious tête-à-tête has lasted an hour and three-quarters ere we reach the great wrought iron gates that give ingress to Wilton Towers, and roll through the park among the oak-clumps and the fallow deer and the thick deep bracken. The place of rendezvous is by the side of a mere, much affected by coots and wild ducks and Canada geese—a piece of water more remarkable for extent than beauty.

Here we find our associates mooning and loafing about, like unburied spirits on the hither side of Styx; heavy and displeased are most of them. Of such a *fête* as the present, the eating part, the fleshpots and flagons, forms the marrow, the pith, the

kernel; hitherto these ladies and gentlemen have been put off with husks and rind; and very cross it makes them. We pull up under a spreading horse-chestnut which is tossing its white spikes in the sunny breeze.

"Stop a bit," says Sir Hugh, throwing the reins to the groom, "don't be in a hurry; I'll lift you down."

My sole response is to hurl myself to earth. The velocity of my spring precipitates me to the ground, and of me it may truly be said, in the words of the poet—

"Humpty Dumpty had a great fall."

Half a dozen men rush to pick me up; but I am beforehand with them, and rise to my feet with two great green patches on my dress, where my knees have saluted mother earth. When things come to their worst they always mend, which is not to be wondered at much, considering that there cannot be a *worser* than worst.

The only thing is, it is so difficult to know in this world when our fortunes have reached their nadir; there are so few depths that have not yet a deeper

deep beneath them. Heat and horse-flies, and midges, and the headachy snappishness which is the result of heat, formed the lowest abyss to which poor humanity in our persons was called upon to descend to-day. Half an hour after my *culbute*, life, I think, wore a cheerfuller aspect in the eyes of most of that roasted assemblage; Wilton Towers seemed a more desirable demesne, and even the twelve miles' ride home a more bearable prospect.

At the expiration of that wonder-working thirty minutes (the two grooms being the *Dei ex machinâ*), a white tablecloth lies, like an exaggerated snow-flake, beneath an oak-tree, big enough to have sheltered a dozen blackguard King Charleses in his great leafy heart. Spoons and forks flash in the sunshine that filters through his thick green cloak, tall sloping-shouldered bottles cool themselves in the mere; there is a scent of mint sauce on the breeze, and the young acorns, looking down out of their cups, see beneath them baked meats, frequent as those which adorned the obsequies of Hamlet, King

of Denmark, and yet were enough (they must have been a little stale, mustn't they?) to "coldly furnish forth" his widow's marriage banquet. Pasties were there,

> "Costly made,
> Where quail and pigeon, lark and leveret lay
> Like fossils of the rock, with golden yolks,
> Imbedded and injellied."

Juicy chickens, and juicier lamb, lobsters lurking redly in crisp lettuces, and pastry enough to furnish a cook shop.

Round these cates we sit *accroupis*, on the short fine grass, and feast to the sound of "the long ripple washing in the reeds."

"Capital Sauterne, this!" cries the disbelieving old bachelor, holding up his glass to the light, to see the foam bead sparkle diamond-like. "I wonder where Lancaster gets it; I've tried half a dozen places, and never could get hold of anything decent."

"It *is* nice," owns the widow, sipping.

"By-the-by, *àpropos* of Sauterne, did I ever tell you of a *bon-mot* of Lord ——, the late man, you know, not the present?"

He travels a little nearer to the bereaved one, along the turf, and his wicked old eye twinkles (he has not had the heart to unpack any of his little anecdotic wares, for her benefit, hitherto).

"No, I think not; tell me now, *do*."

"I'm almost afraid, but it really is too good to be lost."

His voice sinks to a *susurrus*, a *chuchottement*, either of which words is more onomatopœiatic than whisper. The widow lends him her ears, and I see them reddening under the combined influence of the Sauterne and the *bon-mot*, which was, I think, a very *mauvais mot*.

"Nice little cob of yours, Lancaster—that black one," says the lean lord; "easy as an arm-chair. Do you ever hunt him?"

"No," says Hugh; "he's hardly up to my weight, particularly over a stiff country like this; he'd be just the thing for you, and he's A 1 at timber."

(All the Lancastrian geese are swans.)

"Is there any *bustard?*" asks the youth with the influenza. "Biss Seybour wadts sobe bustard; Atcha! Atcha!"

"Bless you," murmurs Miss Seymour,

under her breath; the benediction being called forth by the sneeze, not the demand for mustard. I, of course, am next to my host; I always am; people begin to leave that coveted post vacant for me; I made a feeble effort to shirk it at the beginning of the entertainment, but was foiled. Hugh is drinking bottled beer, and making brilliant remarks, and sharing his *petits soins* pretty equally between the silent dove beside him, and the not more silent doves in a pie before him. Dick M'Gregor and Dolly Lestrange seemed to have hardly more appetite for their luncheon than I had; they could not well have had less.

Flirting is, in one respect, like wit—it has never been satisfactorily defined; it is less fortunate than wit, in that it has not yet found a Bishop Barrow to expend pages of gorgeous eloquence in describing it. No object, they say, looks exactly the same in two pair of eyes, nor are any two people's notions on the subject of flirting precisely alike..

Dick and Dolly, however, fulfilled all the conditions required by all the different ideas of all the different people then pre-

sent, on this vexed theme. Firstly, they seemed to have a very great deal to say to each other; secondly, they did not seem to have anything whatever to say to any one else; and thirdly, what they had to say to one another, they appeared compelled to say in a stealthy and secretive manner. Dick's face was troubled "as if with anger or pain," as he lay reclined, like a young river god, among the yellow irises by the rushy margin of the lake. His hat was off, and the sun was busy weaving an aureole like a saint's round his curly head. Poor fellow! there was not much of saintly repose, and there was a great deal of earth's unquiet passion in that honest angry face.

I never knew any woman who could compare with Dolly Lestrange in the art of drawing out and waking into rampant life any spice of the devil which might be lurking latent in a man's soul. She was waking Dick's devil now; I saw her—saw the evil spirit gradually shaking off its sleep, and coming with a lurid light into those eyes which had looked before only vexed, and pained, and thwarted.

Dolly was not a fine woman, as they say,

at all; not *beef to the heels*, by any means; in a grazier's eye she would have had no charm whatsoever. She looked very girlish and simple now as she sat on the grass, leaning on one slight arm, her slender figure looking slenderer than its wont even, in her dark tight-fitting habit, out of which her throat rose, like a lily stem from its sheath,

"Les yeux noirs
Vont au purgatoire,"

you know, she is saying, in her low tender voice; "poor black eyes! that's treating them very badly, isn't it?"

"Your eyes are not black, brown, surely?" says he, with interest.

"No, black, I think—aren't they?"

She raises them full of innocent wondering inquiry, and fixes them on his; rests them there unabashed; neither speaks for a minute, then Dolly, in a half whisper—

"The moon will be up as we go home to-night, won't it? we shall see it in that pretty brook we came down by, shan't we? but, perhaps—oh, I forgot——"

She stops, as though in confusion.

"Forgot what?" he asks, eagerly.

"I forgot that I mightn't—mightn't be riding with—*you*, might—be riding with somebody else; and then I thought——"

"Thought what?"

He bends closer to catch a glimpse of the down-drooped head.

"Oh, nothing—nothing; it was only that—that I thought I should not care much about the brook, or the moonlight, or anything else—*then*."

The great velvet orbs passionate, passion rousing, seek his again, seem unable to tear themselves away. What man can stand it? Dick cannot. I see the broad low brow flushing. I see his eyes *answering* hers; speaking that mysterious thrilling fire-language that surely the devil invented.

"Why should not we ride home together?" he says, softly.

She plays with the wide-open iris flowers, with the stiff, wet iris stems that lie in her lap.

"You might have got tired of me, mightn't you? is that *quite* an impossible hypothesis? Do men ever tire of women?" I think I've read somewhere that they *have* done such a thing before now."

"Never of *some* women; wasn't it of a woman that it was said—

> "'Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
> Her infinite variety?'"

She shakes her head with pretty incredulity. "Cleopatra was Cleopatra; if her case had not been a unique one, her story would not have come down to us; we cannot all, or indeed any of us, expect to have her luck." She sighs, and I see under the dark blue cloth of her bodice, her heart fluttering.

"You live on air, Miss Lestrange," sounds Sir Hugh's deep voice, as he regards me remonstratingly,

> "With his heart full of love,
> And his mouth full of pie."

"No, I don't," I respond snappishly, like a little yelping cur, with his tail between his legs, snapping at a big dog's nose, "pickled salmon is not air, that I'm aware of." The fact is, I have got some pickled salmon on my plate, and am sorely bested to know how to dispose of it, for swallow it, most surely can I not; I could as soon swallow Hugh. I should like to

hurl it, and the platter that contains it, and any other crockery within reach, at Dolly's sleek shapely head; but that may not be. Unguessing of the storm in a tea-cup beside him, in a state of blissful unconsciousness, Hugh takes up the thread of his discourse, begins a new thread rather, for—dear fellow—he is a little discursive.

"We shall have to *do* the house just now, I suppose; walk through a mile and a half of execrable pictures; I will say that for Lord Stencliffe, he has got more vile daubs and bad copies together than any other man in England."

(Oh, for that cut-glass decanter to aim at the bridge of Dolly's nose! oh, to make those black eyes black eyes indeed!)

"H'm! has he?"

"I wonder why one ever comes to see these sort of places. . I never heard any one say they liked it—did you? it's an awful bore, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is; most things *are* awful bores in this world, I think—and people too!"

Sir Hugh laughs lazily; champagne and sunshine, and a heavy luncheon will induce

a certain blandness of manner and indisposition to take offence; he laughs as one laughs at a parrot swearing, or at the rage of anything equally impotent.

"Ha, ha! most people means *me*, I suppose; why are you always so down upon me, I wonder?" I gaze straight before me into space, and feign deafness.

"Never mind!" he says, good humouredly. "I've a pretty tough hide, and I'd rather be pitched into by *you* than kissed by anybody else!"

Hugh never thought it necessary to lower his voice when he said anything tender. The expression "love whisper" never could be applied to his amatory commonplaces; love-shout or love-bellow would be more applicable; any one that chose to listen might hear; he was not saying anything he was ashamed of. Dick does hear, and draws his smooth brows together into a frown. Dolly does hear, and says, with a pretty, playful, dimpling smile—

"Lovers' quarrels! Poor little girl! I hope he is not trifling with her!"

The poor little girl, listening, winds

her pocket-handkerchief tight round her fingers, till it is converted into a ropy, stringy rag, and then bites a piece out of it. *Fête champêtre* has a pleasant sound, but I think the sound is pleasanter than the reality. I think, in sober earnest and in literal truth, it is sweeter far to have one's legs beneath the friendly mahogany, where lively grasshoppers cannot get up them; in a cool dining-room, where one enjoys immunity from phlebotomizing gnats and midges.

The Wilton flies and gnats drew much human blood that day, but we bore our being "let blood" meekly; it was part of our appointed torture. Meekly also we bore the house, and the Dutch Madonnas, and the Lelyan and Knellerian portraits, and the lying anecdotic biographies tacked on to each by that obesest of housekeepers; meekly also the chapel, with the place where the family sat, the place where the ladies' maids sat, the place where the footmen sat; meekly also the gaudy new window to Lady Grace's memory, where a very big blue St. Peter, and a rather big red St. John, and a green impotent

man, stood huddled together in close proximity, with a gate anything but "beautiful," picked out in yellow in the background. Everywhere Hugh followed me like St. Nicholas's pig.

CHAPTER XIX.

"TIME is but a parenthesis in eternity," as somebody grandly says (I always forget the sayers of grand things); if so, what must each of our lives be? A parenthesis in a parenthesis, and a very short parenthesis too. Our life is but as a very little boat tossed on the sea of infinity; it is a small breathing place between the tussle with life at the beginning and the tussle with death at the ending. Poor little lives! what immeasurable self pity fills one, when one thinks of our poor little farthing rushlights, that often, before they are half burnt, great Death blows out! And yet all our reflections and lamentations and moralizing on the brevity of our abiding here, does not do anything towards making one dull minute seem shorter, or greasing the wheels of one tedious hour.

Did the assured knowledge that my existence was but an imperceptible speck in the fields of space make that long long

road between Wilton Towers and Wentworth Park seem a quarter of a mile shorter that night? Not it. Endless appeared to me the lengths of moony turnpike, the wood-shaded windings and twistings among Lord Stencliffe's great quiet oaks and beeches.

Whether it was all love and no champagne, or all champagne and no love, or half love and half champagne, or three quarters love and one quarter champagne, or one quarter love and three quarters champagne, I cannot say; but certain it is, that Hugh became inconveniently tender —tender in the moonlight, tenderer far in the shade. I, in my own mind, ascribed an undue preponderance to the champagne element, and suffered agonies of apprehension lest the grooms behind should overhear his amorous platitudes.

"Jolly and big the moon looks, doesn't it? like a Cheshire cheese!" The moon, the sacred moon, the be-songed, the be-sonneted moon, the moon that Romeo sware by, and that Milton saw

"Stooping thro' a fleecy cloud,"

like a *Cheshire cheese!*

"How poetical," said I, sardonically.

"No, it isn't poetical, I know. I'm not up to the dodge of poetry. I don't go in for those kind of things. I would though, if it would make you like me any better."

Cupid and the vintage of Epernai have infused a certain sentimentality into the dark middle-aged eyes that contemplate me.

"How soon shall we be home?" I ask, abruptly, looking at him discomfortably, and thinking how plain the crow's feet come out in the moonlight.

"Home! Why we've hardly set out yet. We haven't got to the fourth milestone by Thorny Hill, you know!"

"*Haven't* we?"

"What are you in such a hurry to get home for? I feel as if I should not mind going spinning along here for ever behind such tidy cattle and with *you* beside me!"

As he speaks we reach a toll-gate, and the sleepy toll-keeper descends in a slight and sketchy attire, suitable for the wooing of Morpheus, opens the gate for us, and shuts it again behind us. We are coming to a part of the road which runs parallel

to the railway for a quarter of a mile. Rather a dangerous bit of road, for this reason, there is but a narrow strip of field intervening between it and the line; and people with fidgetty horses have found before now the disadvantage of such close proximity to a possible locomotive, at full speed.

We are going along at a spanking trot through the dumb May night; there is not a sound but what we make ourselves. Suddenly the sharp shriek of an engine, as it issues from the tunnel through the Marston Hill at our backs, cuts the stillness.

"Hang it!" says Hugh, "there's a train coming. I hope to God they won't bolt!"

I turn my head, and see the great dim bulk, with the red lamps at the buffers like glaring eyes, devouring space a hundred yards behind us. Then it comes roaring, puffing, thundering by. For a second the chestnuts stop and stand motionless, shivering with terror; then quick as thought, as lightning, they wheel right-round. Snap goes the pole, and off we go, tearing down the road we have just come along. The

broken pole swings to and fro, kicking and banging against their legs, goading them to madness; thud, thud, come the off mare's heels against the splash-board.

"*Damn*," says Hugh, under his breath. "Sit still, Nell?"

No need to give me that injunction. I could not budge an inch if I was to be shot for it. Stock still I sit there, clutching the side of the dog-cart with one hand. The elm tree boles flash by, white in the moonlight; past race the dim harebell carpets beneath them; past rush the hawthorn-crowned hedges. We are nearing the toll-gate.

"By G—," says Hugh, hoarsely, "the gate's shut!"

I see him setting his teeth; he plants his feet against the splash-board, and pulls with all the force of his strong wrists. I see the veins rise in knotted cords on his hands, in the intensity of his exertions. To no purpose; there is no perceptible diminution of their mad speed! With heads down and mouths like iron, on they rush; in two minutes we shall be crashing into the gate, knocked to smithereens probably.

Suddenly Hugh gives one vigorous tug to the right rein; I see what is coming, and stretch out my hand involuntarily to clutch him—to clutch anything—then—smash we go into the hedge bank.

When I discover myself again, for my body has outrun my spirit, I find myself standing on my head in a clump of violets. I reverse myself as soon as possible, that is to say, I return to the position nature intended for me, and erect myself upon my legs again. I look about me, but at first am too giddy to make out anything; everything goes whirling round, and there is a buzzing, surging sound in my ears.

Then I see Hugh likewise picking himself up from among the thorny hedge, where he has been making his downy bed. Down the road the horses go, galloping wildly, dragging the dog-cart on its side along with them. In the ditch sprawls one groom, rather stunned, and from the field on the other side comes the voice of the other, shouting a doleful inquiry as to whether we are killed. Hugh comes staggering, rather dizzily, over to me.

"Are you hurt, Nell?" (very anxiously), no trace of champagne.

"No—o—o, I think not. I—I—believe I'm going—to—to—die!"

I have a recollection of the look of horror on Hugh's countenance at this announcement; then a vision of his arms stretched out, and my tumbling into them, and then my spirit went away for a space, as spirits will sometimes, though whither they go has never, by ancients or moderns, been satisfactorily explained.

As soon as my soul comes back from that trip—how long it is absent I know not—I begin to sneeze violently, and my eyes water profusely, which is the less to be wondered at, as I find a very large bottle of strongest salts held right under my nose, and sending its pungent vapours up my nostrils. I push it away, and look about me. I am in a room I never was in before, an inn parlour evidently; a small room where stalest tobacco and stalest beer contend for kingship over the dominion of smell; a very big-patterned brown and yellow paper on the walls Lord Stencliffe in a cocked hat and red

coat, and with a battle more furious than Armageddon, of which he is apparently unaware, raging behind him, over the chimneypiece; Adam and Eve *au naturel*, over the sideboard; the woman of Samaria, very embonpoint, in a corner; a broken lustre and two crockery lambs on the mantleshelf, and three or four horse-hair chairs.

I myself am lying on a very hard horse-hair sofa; a tidyish elderly woman is standing over me, brandishing a brandy bottle, and oh horror! oh shame! oh infamy! Hugh's arm is under my head, and his face with the middle-aged eyes and the crow's feet—his face—its mahogany streaked with blood, is within two inches of my nose; he is hanging over me like a mother over her baby.

"Feel better?" he asks, concernedly.

Instantly I struggle into a sitting posture.

"Yes, thanks, I'm all right again now, I think; hadn't we better be going home? is the carriage mended?"

Hugh laughs.

"Mended! not exactly! I have not

heard tale or tidings of it yet; if the traces have not broken, it's some way beyond Wilton by now, I should think. I have sent Jackson after those brutes, but I'm hanged if I know when he'll be back again."

I gaze blankly at him.

"How are we to get home then?"

"Ay, that's the rub," he says; "they have not got any sort of a trap that can take us here. I've sent Smith (he was the other groom) walking to Wentworth, and I told him to go as quick as he could, and get them to send the brougham for us."

"How soon can it come?"

He takes out his watch and calculates.

"He's been gone about a quarter of an hour, and it's five minutes past ten now, and it's eight miles *good* to Wentworth—an hour and a half, two hours and a half—three hours; it *may* be here in three hours, that is, if he ever gets there; but he was rather muzzy when we left Wilton, and that *spill* has obfuscated his intellects still further, I'm afraid."

The calmly, cheerful way in which Sir Hugh makes this promising statement *roiles* me—to use a word sanctioned by Clarendon, though fallen from its first estate now—considerably.

"If you thought there was a doubt about his getting there, why on earth didn't you go yourself?" snapped I.

"And leave *you?*" says Hugh, reproachfully, still kneeling beside me.

Neither words, tone, nor attitude are lost upon the goodwife, as I see. She coughs a little, and looks or makes as though she is looking towards the plump Samaritan dame in the corner. I vault from the sofa, as if the spirit of a flea had passed into me, and walk across the room; my legs feel stiff and sore, and I experience an inward longing that Hugh would have the sense to leave the room, and enable me to examine into the number and extent of my casualties.

"Won't the lady take anything?" asks the female Boniface, demurely.

The lady declines, but the gentleman says—

"Take anything! of course she will!

Why, it'll be hours before we get home again; bring in some tea directly, and something to eat; chops, or ham and eggs, or anything, it does not matter what, and—have you got any decent beer?"

When did an Englishman forget to pay his orisons to his great and beneficent god, malt liquor! Of course they *have* decent beer, more than decent, admirable beer, at least so our elderly friend asseverates, and Hugh signifies his intention of migrating to the bar to partake thereof. The landlady and he pass into the little flagged passage, and close the door behind them. I, left to myself, sit down by the window, curse my fate, and those unmannerly blood mares, and count the bruises, great and frequent, on my shins. Presently the hostess returns with a clean tablecloth and tea-things.

"The gentleman 'll soon be back, 'm," she says, consolatorily, to me.

"I dare say."

"He's just gone 'alf a dozen yards down the road to see if he can see hanythink of the man and them brutes of 'osses."

"Oh, has he?" with ostentatious indifference to the communication.

"Do you feel quite yourself again, mum?"

"Quite, thanks."

She arranges a black-glazed tea-pot and two cups and saucers, and then recommences her attack.

"I was so thankful when you come to yourself when you did, mum!"

"Were you?"

"Yes, 'm, because of the gentleman, I mean; I never see a gentleman so put about, about hanythink; no, never. I thought he'd agone off his 'ed a'most."

I see her glancing stealthily at my left hand.

("I should not have cared much if he had," said I, internally). "Perhaps he'd never seen anyone faint before?" I suggested, aloud; "perhaps he thought I was dead!"

"Well, indeed, mum, when you fust come in it gev me quite a turn, *that* it did; 'e was a carryin' of you in his harms, and your 'ead was a 'angin' down over

is shoulder, and your mouth was hopen, and your face was as wite—as wite as that table-cloth; I did raly think you was a corpse at fust."

I relapse into silence, and vultures gnaw my heart. *I*, in Hugh's arms, with my head hanging over his shoulder, and my mouth open! Disgusting tableau! Not only disgusting, but public; witnessed by the two grooms and the landlady, certainly; by a barmaid and a host of boozing boors, probably.

Hugh returned in about a quarter of an hour from his unsuccessful quest after his refractory cattle, and we sat down to tea. It was horribly honeymoonish, as I felt! I poured out Hugh's tea, and he helped me to mutton chops. I did not feel the least inclined for eating, but it was something to do, better than staring at my *vis-à-vis*. When the landlady came in to clear away the tea-things, she found us both sitting on the little window seat, quite *loverly* looking out on the gooseberry and currant bushes, and the sweet basil and mint and marigolds. My Othello,

"Somewhat declined into the vale of years,"

was pouring tales of

"Moving accidents by flood and field"

into the ears of a most unwilling Desdemona.

"What a fright I *was* in when you said you were going to die! I thought I had killed you! What *should* I have done if I had!" he ends, sentimentally, reverting from his Sebastopolian and Lucknowian experiences to our late perils by dog-cart.

"What *would* you have done?" I replied, sarcastically, "why I suppose you'd have had the *body* (me, I mean) conveyed in here, and then you'd have had some beer, and then you'd have posted off to Wentworth to break the news to Dolly!"

"*That* I shouldn't."

I don't know whether he intended me to ask what he would have done; if he did I did not gratify him, but stared out at the gooseberry bushes, and tried to count the nascent gooseberries on the nearest one. Having no further pretence for staying, the goodwife left the room, to my regret. I miss her chaperonage, the

whisking of her sage-green stuff dress, and the cheerful clink of the teaspoons, which sufficed instead of conversation. When she was gone the stillness irked me; it is not a cooling or a soothing process sitting at dead of night alone on a narrow seat with a man who *will* keep edging an inch every five minutes nearer you, and who never moves his eyes from your face.

"I wonder that woman did not know who you were," said I, for the sake of saying something. "She talked of you as *the gentleman*."

"Not to know me, you think, argues herself unknown; well, she's a stranger in these parts, that's it—poor old girl! She was sorely puzzled to make out our relationship to one another, wasn't she?"

"I should have had the greatest possible pleasure in explaining to her that there was not any relationship whatsoever," I answer, drily.

Hobnailed boots stump along the flagged passage into the little bar; men are talking and drinking there; the barmaid's tee-hee, inharmonious, as the laugh of the uneducated always is, rewards their sallies,

and mingles with their haw-haws; they are smoking evidently, for tobacco smoke — bearable now, because fresh — creeps under the door, and assails our noses.

"How does the time go?" I ask, restlessly.

"Five and twenty past eleven."

"Is that all?" (with great disconsolateness of tone.)

"Does the time seem to you to go so slow, *Nell?*"

His arm is, I find, establishing itself on the sill behind me.

"Yes, dreadfully slow," I say, impatiently; "and don't call me *Nell,* please —I don't like it."

The house grows silent, the guests return to their homes, and to the rods their expectant wives have got in pickle for them; the aborigines retire to bed. Hugh and I are virtually alone together—alone with the stars and their mother, the night. Oh, grave, sweet night! how solemn you are! type and figure of death! I know not which is most solemn, a calm or a stormy night; it is but the difference between an angry God and a God at rest. How

often have I watched the stars overspread

"The cool delicious meadows of the night,"

and longed with hot impatience to be floating, upborne, on spirit wings, through those soft dusk fields, finding out how far they spread, and what treasures of delight they held in their airy depths! Night brings back, vivid and clear to us, the faces of our dead ones; gaudy day scares and chases their pale eidola, but in the night we bethink us of the look they wore, of the words they spake, ere they

"Folded their pale hands so meekly,"

and laid their heads on the Reaper's breast. In the night we think steadfastly of our departure—we realize that it will be—that some day we shall surely get that letter signed with the sign manual of the Great King, that letter that bids us set our houses in order, bids us kiss tearful wife and little ones, bids us rise up and come away, for *He* needs us. At night we probe the soul-wounds that the turbulent brawling day has inflicted; we lay to them the salve of humblest prayer and deepest penitence—we make up our accounts with God. But

if we would conjure up our dead, solitude must be the Witch of Endor, whose incantations arouse them for us; if we would ponder in sober seriousness upon our sins there must be no distracting thought, no distasteful company, no impertinent irritations to mar the influences of night and silence.

In that ever-to-be-abhorred night I speak of, I was not alone—not alone, though I would have given one or both my ears to have been so. I was harried by the company of a man, my indifference for whom was fast merging into loathing. Poor Hugh! there was nothing loathable about him, as I see now, on calm retrospection—nothing, except his efforts to act basilisk or charming serpent, a part for which his eyes and the whole cast of his countenance singularly unfitted him. I begged him to take off his watch and lay it on the table, that I might not have to be perpetually appealing to him to know how the time went. Restlessly I rambled up and down the room, every moment seeking information from the impassive China face of my familiar. Stock-still stood, or seemed to

stand, the hands; the progress of the minute was as imperceptible as that of the hour-hand. I could not sit quiet; it seemed as if I were on wires, or had a fit of the crebles. I turned my uneasy eyes helplessly round; what could I do to curtail my sufferings? A few books lay on the little side-board—a few books and a tumbler full of daffodils. I perused the titles eagerly. A Bible and a prayer-book, a tattered primer, Alleine's "Alarm to the Unconverted," and Cumming's "Great Tribulation," the two latter presented to Martha Harris by her kind friend, the Rev. Mr. Smith.

Anybody's "Tribulation" was an attractive title to me now; it woke my sympathy. Was not I in great tribulation myself? Perhaps it might frighten me, or amuse me, or shock me, or do something towards making me forget that dreadful watch and more dreadful man. I get through half a page, and then recur to my old wonder, "how's the time going?" I rise and look. Half-past one!

"It ought to be here by now, oughtn't it?" say I, looking dolorously across the flare of the tallow candles at Lothario.

"It will soon, I dare say," he replies, cheerily. "Probably they were all in bed when he got there, and it would take some time knocking them up, and putting the horses in."

I bring the "Great Tribulation" over to the table, and bend my eyes resolutely on its gloom-breathing pages. The print is very small, and the prophecies are of a nature to make the stoutest heart quail, the limpest hair stand on end; they seem to me only horridly dull. I look up one page and down another; look to see where the chapter ends, and whether it looks pleasanter further on; then I yawn; then I take a peep at Hugh. He is leaning his elbow on the table, and his brown hand is shading his brown eyes, which are taking an inventory of my charms apparently. Some impulse prompts me to say sharply,

"I wish you would look at something besides me!"

"Why should not I look at you, if I like?"

I turn over the pages with quick irritation.

"Because—because it is tiresome and

stupid, and you might find something better to do!"

"There's not much to do here, good or bad, and I don't want anything better."

I turn my back upon him, and peruse a paragraph of an uncomplimentary nature about the *Beast*.

"Nell!"

"I asked you not to call me Nell."

"What am I to call you, then? may I call you Eleanor? Miss Lestrange sounds so stiff."

"You need not call me anything."

Tick, tick, tick, goes the kitchen clock; somebody is snoring overhead.

"Why *will* you turn your back upon me?"

"Because I hate being stared at," I reply, pouting.

"By *me*, I suppose that means; it would be a different tale if it were that long-legged M'Gregor."

This is the first trace of jealousy and spleen I have yet discerned in easy-going Hugh Lancaster. I wheel round with great velocity.

"You've no right to say that," I flash out,

vehemently; "no business to say it; it's mean of you."

"Mean!" he cries, angrily; "that's the very first time any one ever applied that word to me!"

Then he subsides; I think he perceives the absurdity of our sitting there, storming at one another, at dead of night, in that dreary little pot-house.

"Never mind!" says he; "you're a privileged person; you may say what you like."

The candles burn low in the brass candlesticks; the morning wind—wind that carries away so many ebbing lives on its chill pinions, arises; the stars die, and—

"O'er night's brim day boils at last."

"That idiot has lost his way, as I thought he would," says Hugh, whose weather-beaten face looks haggard and grim in the dun misty light.

"Yes," said I, reproachfully; "and if you'd gone yourself, as I wanted you, we should have been back hours ago."

"It was your fault," he replies, rather

downcast by my persistent snubbing. "Cannot you forgive me for liking too much to be with you?"

He says it so bluntly and so humbly that I feel compunction. I stand by the window, and watch the dawn's birth. I can almost see the wind

"Waking each little leaf to sing."

Even a hot day often comes in coldly, and sitting up all night is not warming to the blood. I shiver.

"Are you cold?" Hugh asks.

"Yes, rather, and my arm smarts a little; I wonder did I bruise it when I fell."

I pull down my sleeve, and consider my maimed limb. What is there in nature or art so pretty, so appealing to the senses as a beautiful arm? Mine was beautiful, round and firm, and polished like marble, that some god had kissed into warm life; with dear little nicks and dimples about elbow and wrist. I find a big black bruise, and two or three long red scratches on the soft cream-white flesh. "It hurts," I say, looking up rather ruefully at my com-

panion, somewhat after the manner that a dog does that has got a thorn in his foot, when he comes limping up, with upheld paw, to any one he thinks in his doggish mind looks friendly. Mahogany faces can look loving and pitiful just as well as alabaster ones, though they don't do it so becomingly. Hugh's did now. Oh, the perversity of this human nature of ours! Why, in the name of common sense, could not I look loving too? Why could not I feel loving? Why could not I tumble straightway into his honest ready arms, as he stood there with

> "The lights of sunset and of sunrise mixed"

upon his face: stood there, unkempt, unshorn, grizzly as a mechanic on a week day? To fall into his arms was to fall into the arms of £12,000 per annum, and a house in May Fair. It included the ideas of clover for life; fine clothes, high feeding, and other delights. "Poor little arm," he says, "we must get some plaister for it; let me kiss the place to make it well!"

His moustache just brushes the surface, has not time to do more, before I snatch it

away as from a hyena about to mumble it; snatch it away from £12,000 a year, as if it had been twelve brass farthings paid quarterly. "Leave me alone, *do!*" I cry, fierce as a young tigress, looking volumes of outraged virtue at him; "will you never understand that I *hate* you?"

Hugh pales, as men do in any strong emotion; it is their equivalent for women's "*torrent de pleurs!*"

"I have been rather dull of comprehension," he says, "but don't be alarmed; I understand now *fully!*"

We retire to two different corners, and glower at one another. The house awakes and shakes itself; girds up its loins for its day's work; the barmaid and the ostler are heard exchanging matutinal gallantries in the bar, and the landlady enters slip-shod, curl-papered, to "know what will be for breakfast?" Breakfast! Oh, ye gods! shall we then have to undergo another grievous tête-à-tête repast? Shall I again pour out Hugh's tea? Will he again help me to ham and eggs? As I thus ruminate, despair creeping coldly over me, even while Mrs. Harris urges lamb chops on

Hugh's notice—even while the savour of bacon, incipiently frizzling, insinuates itself through the walls, I hear the sound of wheels.

Eagerly I run out to the inn door, and stand with hand shading my eyes from the morning sun, while the Blue Boar swings above me. Surely, surely, I know those big bays, and that sociable—behind which and in which old Lady Lancaster and her yellow wig make their weekly pilgrimage to church. I rush back to Hugh, crying joyfully, "The carriage is come! hurrah!" and fall to youthful caperings and actions, expressive of intensest relief. I know now with what accent a shipwrecked mariner shouts, "A sail! a sail!"

Hugh looks askance at me and my gymnastics; then comes out, and damns his servants; wishes to know why the devil they have not come sooner, and what the deuce they mean by their d—d impertinence? In fact he is in a towering rage, such a rage as they have not seen him in since he came into the property, twenty years ago. It surprises them a little, and amuses them a good deal.



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